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# Open English: Introducing Accelerated Learning in Developmental Coursework at STCC

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**Open English**  
**Introducing Accelerated Learning in**  
**Developmental Coursework at STCC**

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**Community College Leadership Academy**

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**June 6, 2011**



**Open English**  
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**Developmental Coursework at STCC**

**Introduction to Open English**

How accessible is higher education to the underprepared student? This report is about an innovative option being offered to motivated students interested in shortening the time it takes to complete developmental coursework. The key is forming a community. By working hard the very first semester and combining work in the gateway college-level English course with supplemental learning offered in a companion cohort within a small group setting, students now have the option to attempt both courses their first semester using the techniques of accelerated learning in a community setting. In other words, the plan is to mainstream eight developmentally-placed students in the English Composition 1 course with 12 students placed at college-level. The college-level writing students serve as role models. After English class, the high-scoring, developmentally-placed students attend a small companion course of Review for College Writing to review, discuss, and practice aspects of college-level writing. The second course is a support group, which creates an academic community to support, connect, and sustain the academic progress of the group. The cohort provides an academic motivational identity.

Springfield Technical Community College (STCC), located in Massachusetts, boasts many specialized majors in technologies and allied health in addition to liberal arts transfer programs providing access to four-year institutions. The College mission statement advocates for social justice, and students assessed as underprepared for college-level work are provided with plans that include developmental courses designed to upgrade students' skill sets as needed.



In fact, as an Achieving the Dream institution, STCC has adopted policies for extended hours in math courses, revised college success learning communities, and dedicated intrusive advising for at risk students. In addition to these initiatives, STCC is also offering Open English accelerated learning based on the work of Peter Adams of the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) of the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC), who advocates for the adoption of courses that mainstream developmentally-placed students into the college-level course setting, which also provides students with additional contact hours with the classroom instructor and the cohort of eight students to discuss, review, and master the coursework of the college-level class.

The work of CCBC in accelerated learning has come to the attention of the Community College Research Center (CCRC), Teachers College, Columbia University. CCRC has measured the success of the ALP program, and has added significant research on the value of accelerated learning in developmental coursework. The availability of Open English accelerated learning is another opportunity to succeed at STCC. This report reflects the planning, implementation, and future innovations in Open English at STCC and documents and first pilot results.

As an instructor in the gateway course, English Composition 1 and the Open English accelerated learning pilot, this writer is one of many at our college looking for ways to help our students succeed at STCC. The Open English format of accelerated learning is an alternative mode of instruction based on student motivation and a sense of community. It is about making connections. It has worked well at CCBC, and is now being offered to interested students at STCC through the support of our dean and the chairs of the English and Developmental English chairs and faculty. The Open English accelerated learning option is an opportunity for students who want to advance rapidly through the developmental milestones by participating in an intensive learning community than involves mainstreaming and academic community identity.



## Literature Review

### Why We Need Open English

In the eighteen-year study of a Springfield family in Timothy Black's *When a Heart Turns Rock Solid: The Lives of Three Puerto Rican Brothers On and Off the Streets*. The parents of the siblings hoped that moving to Springfield, Massachusetts would help their sons become successful, but the young men were unable to thrive in the community college setting because of poor English language skills and an inability to connect academically with a group on campus. For example, the elder son graduated from Commerce High School in the English as a Second Language (ESL) program, but lacked the preparation to succeed at a local community college.

On the surface, Julio flunked out of college because he couldn't do the work in English. Even though he graduated from high school, Julio's English language skills were only marginally better than his brothers, and his Spanish grammatical skills were mediocre at best. His grades in language classes at Commerce High always lagged behind his performance in other classes. After one semester of community college, Julio's view on bilingual education changes—he became critical of the program for not educating him better in English. I suspect, however, that more was going on—after all, many students arrive at college with poor reading and writing skills, but most are able to negotiate classes and remedial programs that move them through a college curriculum.

One explanation is that Julio lost the support he had received at Commerce High that had reinforced his student identity. The community college was a commuter school located in another town and Julio never developed a



network of support—an academic community—within the school (Black, 2009, p. 43-44)

Reading about the brothers' experiences can change perceptions of the difficulties students face and what they might need in terms of academic support. At STCC we realize that some of our students face difficulties similar to the brothers depicted in Dr. Black's study. Some of these difficulties include low entrance assessment scores, lack of connection to academic groups on campus, problems with child care, working too many hours, losing housing, unreliable transportation, unrealistic time management expectations, and low self-esteem.

In fact, As an Achieving the Dream college STCC has discovered through data analysis that “There is a discernable gap between minority (Black and Hispanic) and White students from the beginning of their first semester” (STCC website), and STCC is working to improve first experiences with college success seminars, Intrusive case-management advising, and extended contact time in remedial math courses. We also began thinking about ways to improved English language writing instruction, and we became interested in accelerated learning practices. In June of 2010 this instructor had an opportunity to attend the Community Colleges of Baltimore County Accelerated Learning Project (ALP) Conference in Baltimore with colleagues including our Dean of Humanities, who has been very supportive.

After returning from the conference, our academic dean and I met with the chairs of our English and Developmental English departments and all of us created a support committee, which included members of the English and Developmental English departments. We made our plans during the fall 2010 semester, and launched the Open English accelerated learning pilot spring 2011 semester with mixed results, which were mostly positive, and plans are underway to continue the initiative this fall 2011 semester. The Open English pilot has been a rewarding



project. Our planning was based on the accelerated learning principles advocated by Peter Adams of the Community College of Baltimore College (CCBC) and his Accelerated Learning Program (ALP).

### **How Open English Works**

In “The Accelerated Learning Program: Throwing Open the Gates” Peter Adams, Sarah Gearhart, Robert Miller, and Anne Roberts report on the experiences regarding the accelerated learning program (ALP) at the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) and the conferences about the project. The ALP conferences on accelerated learning came about after Peter Adams began to track and report on longitudinal success rates. He discovered that many students in remedial courses give up before attempting the college level course. He viewed this situation as being “more of a gate than a path to college success” (Adams, Gearhart, Miller, & Roberts, 2009, p. 52). Since students need the English Composition course to graduate with a certificate or a degree, students not completing English are not earning credentials (p. 53). Instead of isolating developmental writers in remedial courses, a plan was devised to mainstream students into the college-level English course by providing adequate support to help them succeed (p. 53). Peter Adams and his CCBC team explain the process:

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. (p. 57)

Mainstreaming seems to have a powerful psychological effect on students. Adams states that allowing students in reduces adoption of a second-class status (p. 60). Membership in at least one academic community is another benefit to the cohort of students participating in the follow-up course the next hour tend to bond to the group and the college, which keeps students in school (p. 60). The small class size in the companion course (8 students) is considered an essential feature of ALP (p. 61). Learning communities that foster content have been shown to improve the absorption of contextual learning (p. 61). Accelerated learning helps avoid a longer “pipeline” (p. 62) of courses required of students. Asking students to create a timeline of weekly activities calls attention to the behavioral issues that aid success in terms of time management. Students often have an unrealistic view of the time it takes to prepare assignments, and a frank discussion may result in signing up for fewer courses or cutting back on work hours, for example. The smaller class size, in general, allows the instructor to get to know the student and help develop success strategies (p. 62). The cohort has also been a group that can benefit from visiting advisors to help with life issues outside of class such as housing, sick children, and work related issues (p. 63).

The costs of the program are at an acceptable level when taking into consideration the outcomes. As Adams and his colleagues state:

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. (p. 64)

### **Characteristics of Accelerated Learning Instruction**

#### *In Teaching Intensive and Accelerated Courses: Instruction That Motivates Learning*

Raymond J. Wlodkowski, professor emeritus at the College of Professional Studies, Regis University, Denver, is represented as “a psychologist who specializes in adult motivation and learning” (Wlodkowski and Ginsberg, 2010, p. xiii). Coauthor Margery B. Ginsberg, an associate professor in educational leadership and policy studies at the University of Washington-Seattle, College of Education, has taught on Indian reservations. “Her primary interest is in innovative instruction and professional learning to create schools that are increasingly responsive to diverse learners” (p. xiii). Formats with accelerated and intensive characteristics “reduce the amount of time to earn a credential or degree” (p. 1). Therefore, they have become very popular with adult students interested in moving up in the work force (p. 3).



Wlodkowski and Ginsberg believe that the kind of motivation that enables learning is “intrinsic motivation” (p. 19), which translates into the concrete actions “four motivational conditions: inclusion, attitude, meaning, and competence” (p. 20). Inclusion establishes “*respect* and *connectedness*” (p. 20). The classroom instructor can establish a comfortable learning environment that encourages and promotes these attributes. The authors describe attitude toward education as the “information, beliefs, values, and emotions” (p. 20). Meaning is described in several ways including “interpreting information” (p. 22). The final term, competence, is defined as the “effective interactions with their world” (White qtd in Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2010, p. 23). Putting these conditions into action in the classroom is a design referred to as “The Motivational Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching” (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2010, p. 24).

In “Accelerated Learning: Future Roles and Influences” Wlodkowski & Kasworm identify a new role for accelerated learning, which includes modernization and restructuring. They state that, “Probably a role being played less intentionally by accelerated learning is that of reformer. There is evidence that accelerated learning programs are more effective with nontraditional learners, operate at significantly lower costs, and have similar or better learning outcomes” (Wlodkowski & Kasworm, 2003, p. 95). Results may raise questions on instructional delivery (p. 95).

According to Drick Boyd, a faculty member in the School of Management Studies at Eastern University, which is an accelerated degree program for working adults, “The key to effective accelerated learning is to use the whole brain in the learning process” (Boyd, 2004, p. 40). In his article, “Effective Teaching in Accelerated Learning Programs,” in *Adult Learning*, He mentions the research of Kasworm regarding adult degree completion programs, “There are



three components of successful adult-oriented accelerated learning programs” (Kasworm, 2003, qtd in Boyd, 2004, p. 41).

First, adults are successful in accelerated programs because teachers assume that adults are competent contributors to society. Second, successful accelerated learning programs design a classroom environment aligned with the adult student’s day-to-day world....” (Kasworm, 2003, qtd in Boyd, 2004, p. 41), Third, successful accelerated programs build on adult identity theories....” (Baxter Magdola, 1999, p. 241 qtd in Boyd, 2004, p. 41).

Collaborative rather than competitive learning is an aspect that has become common in accelerated learning circles as the “community of support” collaborative learning fosters helps accelerated learners connect with other students and form academic support systems (Boyd, 2004, p. 41).

### **Independent Corroboration**

In “Issue Brief: Developmental Education in Community Colleges” Prepared for: The White House Summit on Community College, Thomas Bailey & Sung-Woo Cho, of the Community College Research Center ( CCRC), Teachers College, Columbia University, developmental accelerated learning is making inroads into successful outcomes for students under prepared for college.

*Evidence of effectiveness:* The Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) has had the ALP since the 2007-08 academic year. Using a multivariate analysis, one study found that among CCBC students who were referred to the highest level of developmental English, those who enrolled directly into the college-level



course and the concurrent ALP companion course were significantly more likely to take and pass that college-level course and the course immediately after it (English 101 and 102) than those who enrolled in the highest level of developmental education.<sup>6</sup> ALP was also found to be a significantly more cost-effective pathway through the required college-level English courses than the traditional developmental sequence, as measured by cost per successful student. Because of the promising preliminary findings on the program, CCBC is in the process of scaling up ALP such that by next year, the majority of students who are referred to the highest level developmental English course will be enrolled in English 101 with the concurrent ALP support course. (Bailey and Cho, 2010, p. 5)

A comprehensive study of the ALP program was conducted in 2010 by a group from the Community College Research Center (CCRC), Teachers College, Columbia University. In a paper entitled, “A Model for Accelerating Academic Success of Community College Remedial English Students: Is the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) Effective and Affordable?” researchers Davis Jenkins, Cecilia Speroni, Clive Belfield, Shanna Smith Jaggars, and Nikki Edgecombe used quantitative analysis of the program and concluded that the program is a beneficial and effective mode of instruction benefiting underprepared students in the community college setting.

The group reported that, “more than half of recent high school graduates who enter postsecondary education through community colleges enroll in at least one remedial or ‘developmental’ course in math, reading, or writing (Attewell, Lavin, Domina & Levey, 2006, qtd in Jenkins, Speroni, Belfield, Jaggars, and Edgecombe, 2010, p. 1). The group of Jenkins, Speroni, Belfield, Jaggars, and Edgecombe reported on a recent “handful of studies” (p. 1),



which “used rigorous statistical methods to compare results” (p. 1) and concluded that, “These studies generally show little positive effects for developmental education, although their results are most reliable for students at the upper end of the developmental range—that is, for students who are assigned to remediation but who score near the developmental ‘cut-off’ point on placement tests” (Bettinger & Long, 2005; Calangno & Long, 2008; Martorell & McFarlin, 2007; qtd in Jenkins, Speroni, Belfield, Jaggars, & Edgecombe, 2010, p. 1). Therefore, if the students closer to the cut-off point benefit the most from remedial efforts, a plan that can speed up the time it takes to prepare for college-level work has merits on the basis of saving students time and money, and perhaps, using the very motivation that caused the student to apply. Therefore, if the students closer to the cut-off point benefit the most from remedial efforts, a plan that can speed up the time it takes to prepare for college-level work has merits on the basis of saving students time and money, and perhaps, using the very motivation that caused the student to apply to college in the first place.

The ALP course innovation is described as “structural rather than instructional” (Jenkins, Speroni, Belfield, Jaggars, & Edgecombe, 2010, p. 2) since 100% of the students placed in the developmental course attempt the gateway course as opposed to about 50% of the traditional developmental placements. The innovative instruction takes place in the support course, “it occurs during the ALP companion course, where faculty have the latitude to provide any instruction they think appropriate to help ALP students succeed in ENGL 101” (p. 2). The study looks closely at data beginning with the ALP launch, “in 2007-08 with 10 sections and 80 students” (p. 3), and “60% of ALP students passed English 101, compared with about a quarter of students who began with the highest level developmental English course. Because the successful ALP students completed English 101 in one semester instead of the two required by



the conventional model, the ALP approach produced more than double the success rate in half the time” (p. 3).

CCBC used descriptive analysis, but CCRC used multivariate statistics to examine the results (p. 4.). “This multivariate analysis suggests that, among students who are referred to the highest level of developmental English at the Community College of Baltimore County, those who enroll directly into ENGL 101 and the concurrent ALP companion course, are significantly more likely than those who first enroll in the highest level developmental English course (ENGL 052) to take and pass English 101 and 102” (p. 15-16).

In a follow-up 2011 study of progress and outcomes of community college students tracked over a five-year time span, Davis Jenkins in the brief, “Get with the Program: Accelerated Community College Students’ Entry into and Completion of Programs of Study,” Jenkins reports how many college students are “sidetracked by remedial courses” (Jenkins, 2011, p. 1). Jenkins reports that the current data involving longitudinal studies (Leinbach & Jenkins, 2008; Moore, Shulock, & Offenstien, 2009; Offenstien & Shulock, 2010; Reyna, 2010 qtd in Jenkins, 2011, p. 4) support identifying where along the way students drop out. Jenkins looks at the “intermediate milestone” of completion of three college-level courses (Bailey, Jenkins, & Leinbach, 2006, qtd in Jenkins, 2011, p. 4). The data suggests, “Entering a program of study as soon as possible. Students who entered a program of study in the first year performed substantially better than did those who became concentrators in the second year or later” (p. 6). Jenkins’s found that:

Students in the cohort who first entered college soon after high school attempted to enter a program of study at a higher rate than did students who did not start college



until they were older. However, the gap between those who attempted to enter a concentration and those who succeeded was larger among those recently out of high school than among older students (20 percentage points for students who first enrolled at age 19 or younger versus 10 percentage points for students who first enrolled at age 27 or older. (10)

Jenkins attributes “the greater clarity of goals and determination often observed (referring to Calcagno, Crosta, Bailey, & Jenkins, 2007, qtd in Jenkins, 2011) among older students as a likely explanation.

Jenkins found that “About two thirds of students in the sample who succeeded in entering a program of study concentrated in liberal arts and sciences, while the other third concentrated in a career-technical program....(p. 12).

Jenkins concludes that,

To improve completion rates on a substantial scale, rather than trying to bring to scale best practices, community colleges should follow a “best process” approach of rethinking their practices in ways that strengthen pathways to program entry and completion. For this to happen, college faculty, staff, and administrators from across silos should work together to review processes, and services at each stage of the student’s experience with the college and redesign or better align college practices to accelerate entry into and completion of programs of study leading to credentials of value. (P. 17)

Jenkins ends his brief with instructions for changes across campus, which as an Achieving the Dream (AtD) school, STCC is already implementing. As the original faculty member of the AtD Core Team since 2007, and the longtime Core Team recorder of minutes,



this researcher has been apprised of data trends, high school outreach, college success seminar revamping, instituting intrusive, case-management style advising, extended hours for math, participation on the developmental task force committee, and advisor of a college community service club. Open English in accelerated learning is the next step. Therefore, many of Jenkins suggestions concur with our data findings, and STCC appears to be on the right track.

### **Open English Accelerated Learning Project Background**

Open English accelerated learning may well have come out of an awareness on campus about student success in general generated by our involvement as an Achieving the Dream college since 2007. Campus-wide participation in important committees at STCC including our Achieving the Dream initiative and Developmental Task Force has produced diverse activism. This activism developed a strong commitment to forms of academic community. Over time a perspective of community college learning that is fairly comprehensive has evolved. In other words, students who are connected to STCC in some way through classroom cohorts, participation in extracurricular activities, as members of a particular program, or knowing an advisor or faculty member, tend to have a link to STCC, which can be called an academic community. Membership in an academic community can make a difference in completing credentials. Making connections through a sense of belonging can help students succeed at STCC. Open English provides another academic community to support student success.

STCC joined the five-year Achieving the Dream initiative in 2007, and we will begin our final year this fall. After improving data collection, analyzing the data, instituting changes in the College Success seminar; extending contact hours in developmental math; and practicing the case-management, intrusive advising model for students at risk; the Achieving the Dream Core



Team committee turned its attention to looking at ways to shorten the time developmental students spend on developmental English courses.

As the literature review presented in this paper suggests, the quicker students enter their majors, the more likely they are to complete credentials. One viable solution we looked at is accelerated learning. Therefore, we attended the ALP conference June 2010. As previously stated, the Accelerated Learning Project (ALP) of Baltimore County Community College, managed by Peter Adams, is successful and, as the literature review shows, well documented.

Especially impressive was a simple presentation by Linda S. De La Ysla, an assistant professor of English at the Community College of Baltimore County. Her presentation was called, “‘Knee-to-Knee’: The Conference as a Tool for Empowering Students.” She began her presentation by having the participants write a few paragraphs about making a connection with a student. Her tactic engaged the audience, and her philosophy of the importance of making connections with students validated the need for academic community membership. Overall the conference was exhilarating as a new approach for reaching out to students, and we decided to give it a try.

When we returned to STCC in the fall of 2010, we established a committee of English Department and Developmental English Department faculty, both departments chairs, and the dean of our school. Our faculty members provided valued resources in terms of time answering questions, sharing course syllabi, and acting as a support group. We worked out some specifics about who would most likely be successful in an accelerated learning format, and with input from all parties, students testing near the cut-off score of the Accuplacer test, or borderline students required to write an essay, were determined to be the targeted group. As we informed our president of our plans, he suggested we begin our pilot in the spring of 2011, and we did. The



first day of school looked promising. There were exactly 20 students enrolled in the ENGL-100-B02 section of the gateway English Composition 1 section, and exactly eight students enrolled in the DWRT-099-B02 section of the developmental Review for College Writing section. However, everything was not as it seemed. After a closer inspection, we found we had enrollment problems.

### **Spring Pilot 2011**

#### **Enrollment Problems**

Starting a pilot Spring Semester has the inherent problem of dealing with a smaller population than the Fall Semester, which is traditionally the start of new student enrollment. Also, communicating what a new pilot, such as accelerated learning in English, was all about proved to be more difficult than we imagined. Although we prepared a clear flyer for advisors, which pointed out the cut-off numbers we were looking for were students just missing the cut-off for ENGL-100-B02, our English Composition 1 gateway course, the majority of the students enrolled in the pilot actually tested into English 100, which proved to be a problem in that we could not keep those students from dropping the companion cohort.

We had problems with our roster of students from the very beginning. Although the first day of classes showed a roster of the ideal number of eight students enrolled in the cohort companion course, DWRT-099-B02, Review for College Writing, the students placed in ENGL-100 were no-shows. They had figured out that they would be required to participate in an additional three hours of course time, but we could not hold them to it. They chose to drop the companion course.



At about the same time, we discovered a bit of a glitch in our online registration system. Though there was a clear note next to DWRT-099-B02 that students must also be enrolled in ENGL-100-B02, some students missed or ignored the note. These students registered for only the companion cohort. We also had a problem with at least one student, who had difficulties with a financial aid situation resulting in her being administratively withdrawn for nonpayment, and as the course progressed, some students were dropped from the pilot for lack of attendance, which included, for one student, a new job work conflict.

As a result of these various difficulties the first Open English accelerated learning pilot had a class composition of three students, who formed a small community with the instructor, and two thirds of the students moved up after passing an exit essay test graded by two independent instructors to move on to ENGL-100, or ENGL-200 for Open English.

Eligibility for the Open English accelerated learning pilot was set at an Accuplacer score of between 80-85, or a challenge essay that showed ability to benefit from the pilot. Only one eligible Open English student, with a score of 80, enrolled in both DWRT-099-B02 and ENGL-100-B02, and we are pleased she passed both courses, and is enrolled in ENGL-200 this fall.

A new student, whose entrance test score at 42 was too low to be considered for Open English, successfully completed DWRT-099, and is able to enroll in ENGL-100 this fall.

The third student, who was repeating DWRT-099, was unsuccessful. The score listed on her entrance test is 26. She has yet to earn a C or better grade in DWRT-099 after several tries. The unsuccessful student's exit essay documented a lack of specific examples and details. However, all the students improved in choosing better verb tenses, organizing information, and structuring paragraph order. Even though this third student was unsuccessful, she improved.



## **Results**

The sample from the launch of the Open English pilot is too small to make any long range determinations, but we find the results promising because two thirds of the participants moved on to their respective next level of instruction. As a result we are offering Open English next semester, and planning to expand the pilot in the future to include additional sections if we are able to document need.

## **Changes**

We plan to make several changes in Fall Semester 2011 including enrollment, materials, and methodology.

### **Changes in Enrollment**

We need to be clear and educate advisors serving the population we hope to interest. For example, we have already discussed with advisors that the Open English accelerated learning pilot helps high-scoring developmentally-placed students, not low-scoring college-level placed students. Students placed in the gateway English Composition 1 course are not our targeted audience because our first attempt at an Open English pilot has shown that any college-level placement allows for those students to withdraw from the developmental companion course.

We need to redirect most low-scoring developmentally-placed students into traditional developmental courses, for the most part, if possible, in order to closely approximate the ALP configuration for data analysis.

However, a collaborative effect took place in our companion cohort, which was a positive outcome. The students enrolled in Open English this semester were fully aware that one student



was attempting to complete two courses in one semester, developmental English for institution credit, and English Composition 1 for graduation credit. The successful developmentally-placed student, especially, seemed to feed off of the collaboration in the classroom, which may have contributed to his success. In other words, there was an impression that his enthusiasm and motivation increased with exposure to the student who was identified as attempting the college-level course. This identification seemed to emulate the role model effect of mainstreaming high-scoring developmentally-placed students with college-level scorers.

In fact, over time, even the very low-scoring, course-repeating student developed enough confidence to begin to participate in our self-readings of drafts. In other words, in the beginning of the course, the lowest scoring student refused to read her work aloud, but she was always asked to participate, and eventually, she did. As students shared work with each other, the work improved. Therefore, though data collection might be muddled by a wide range of entrance scores, the benefit to individual students of placing them in the companion course might outweigh other considerations.

### **Changes in Materials**

Originally, students in the Open English pilot were asked to purchase a college-level reader and a style manual for the ENGL-100 course and a developmental reader for the DWRT-099, which means that not only were the pilot students required to pay for two courses, they had to pay for an additional text as well. The instructor has decided that the developmental reader is not necessary, since much of the coursework revolves around topics generic to both courses. Much more effective than the instructors original plans was beginning with paragraphs handwritten in class on lined index cards, which were about the size of a half sheet of standard



paper. The instructor highlighted errors in the paragraphs, and the students worked to define and fix the errors. When we moved on to essay writing, which occurred earlier in the semester than anticipated, work continued to reflect topics discussed in the gateway, English Composition 1, ENGL-100 course. Therefore, the texts required for the fall will be limited to *Community Matters: A Reader for Writers* by Ford and Schave Sills, and The CUSTOM STCC version of Hacker's *A Pocket Style Manual*, either the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> edition. (We have a Writing Across the Curriculum tradition of encouraging students to purchase the style manual their first semester at STCC and keep it for future papers.)

### **Changes in Methodology**

The changes in instruction are based on changes that seemed to occur naturally as the first pilot progressed. For example, the instructor expected to spend more time on developing sentence and paragraph structures, but the sentences and paragraphs were addressed within actual essay formats, which ended up being introduced earlier in the semester than the instructor had planned.

Another happenstance was the collaborative effect of sharing work in class. In part because of the small class size, students got to know each other and establish a sense of trust. As we developed a rapport, we built on collaborative exercises in sharing work. The instructor remembers fondly our exercise in developing an essay about which area business establishment produced the best pizza. We examined such considerations as what makes a good slice. For example, one student likes thin-crust, crispy dough topped with more vegetables than sauce or cheese, while another student raved about a thick-crust pizza necessary to soak up all the tasty



grease. The third student was more concerned with the convenience of home delivery, while the other two were willing to travel out of town or across town for quality considerations.

When writing in class became fun, making deadlines for the out-of-class finished product improved. The work became more fun when the results became more polished. Contributing to the knowledge of the group allows for understanding what could be and adds to the development of confidence of each individual involved in the process.

### **Conclusion**

Open English accelerated learning is the latest addition to advances at STCC in helping to make higher education more accessible to the underprepared student. It is included as one of many initiatives such as extended contact time, intrusive advising, and learning communities encouraging college success. Open English applies principles of accelerated learning developed over time in adult learning and continuing education classes for people who want to work for rapid academic advancement. The components of accelerated learning include such tenants as academic community identity, collaboration, motivation, and small class size. Combining the mainstreamed college-level coursework with the group setting of the companion cohort differs in structure in how developmental classes in community college have been traditionally organized. In other words, following the college-level course with the companion cohort allows students opportunities to review, ask questions, summarize, practice, and collaborate, which helps define directions, strategies, and supports resolve.

The first section of Open English at STCC was offered in the spring of 2011, which was extremely small because of enrollment challenges. However, the experience helped organizers understand and make plans to accommodate the nature of the administrative challenges, and two



thirds of the students in the initiative moved on to their next planned level. With insights gleaned from the first application of Open English at STCC, the Open English option is being offered again this fall. There are plans to send an delegation from STCC to the June 2011 ALP conference, and there are plans to expand Open English in the future as a viable option for high-scoring, motivated, developmentally-placed students who are interested in completing the developmental and gateway writing courses in a single semester.

Our overall plan is to find many ways to help our students succeed and complete certificate and degree programs at our college. Although the Open English pilot mentioned in this brief proved too small to definitively impact policy yet, we are encouraged by the current data at other schools such as the ALP program at CCBC and the analysis of that data by CCRC. Hopefully, as we continue to make modest inroads into the accelerated learning landscape we can find room in our educational collection of techniques and philosophical points of view to add Open English accelerated learning to the mix, and as our mission statement mentions, “Springfield Technical Community College, a leader in technology and instructional innovation, transforms lives through educational opportunities that promote personal and professional success” (STCC website). Open English accelerated learning has the potential to change lives.

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