

**College of Arts and Sciences**

**ESL Specialist Report**

**Spring 2013**

**Katy D’Angelo, Jennifer Rivers, & May Saffar**

**28 May 2013**

1. **Introduction and Summary of Achievements**

This report contains data pertaining to the ESL pre-foundational writing course – ENGL105ES. This was the second semester that this course was taught. In light of drastic changes to this course curriculum after all students failed ENGL105ES in the Fall 2012 semester, students saw tremendous improvement in outcomes in Spring 2013, with 83% of students passing the class. Perhaps the biggest factor contributing to this increase in pass rates was the revision policy that allowed students to revise every assignment.

Nevertheless, upon closer review of the graded final essays of ENGL105ES students, the Writing Specialists remain concerned that the course standards and expectations were not applied when evaluating ESL student writing. As is evident in the final paper student samples attached in the appendix, all five of the essays submitted for grading would not have passed in either the ENGL105 or ENGL105S section because they had extensive deficiencies in grammar, sentence and paragraph structure, and elements of the essay including: thesis with clear sub-points, introductory hook, context for debate, consideration of alternative points of view, and appropriate acknowledgement of outside sources.

**II. Dashboard ENGL105ES**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Fall 2012 | Spring 2013 |
| **Original Roster Pass Rates**  | 0% | 83% |
| **Active Roster Pass Rates**  | 0% | 83% |
| **Completion Rates**  | 0% | 100% |
| **Grammar Diagnostic Scores** for ENGL105S | **Pre-Test** | **Post-Test** | **Pre-Test** | **Post-Test** |
|  –  |  –  | 40.9% | 51.9% |

**III. Goals for ENGL105ES**

**Goal 1:** **To improve pass rates in ENGL105ES, in light of low student performance in the Fall 2012 semester.** Because of certain factors the ESL instructor recognized at the start of the Fall 2012 semester (the students’ significant deficiencies in sentence-level grammar, coupled with the course’s lack of a supplemental grammar lab), the first iteration of this course saw several readjustments to the syllabus to meet students at their current skill level. However, the result was that students in the ESL curriculum did not cover nearly enough material to meet the standardized objectives of the ENGL105 program; further, the students were not able to handle the longer essay assignments and the pass rate for the course was far lower than anticipated.

**Progress:** Although none of the students enrolled in ENGL105ES in Fall 2012 passed the class, Trinity was able to retain 82% of them. Of the 11 students who failed ENGL105ES in Fall 2012, nine of them re-enrolled in Spring 2013, although three of these did not re-enroll in an ESL section. Of these nine repeaters, 77.8% passed the class on their second attempt.

For the six students enrolled in ENGL105ES in Spring 2013, five of them passed the class, signaling a pass rate of 83%. This increase in pass rate could well be related to the following factors: the instructor applied a revision policy in which students could revise all papers (except the final paper) for a new grade if they had not earned a passing grade on the assignment. This policy also required students to visit the Writing Center for further assistance on the revision; therefore, students had two rounds of revision on each assignment. As it turned out, all five students enrolled in ENGL105ES revised all five of the eligible formal writing assignments. Through this exercise all students were able to earn passing grades on their assignments.

Other factors that may have influenced pass rates included a high rate of attendance and a low rate of abandonment, with only one student abandoning the course. In addition, the fourth instructional hour of grammar lab gave students greater understanding of their sentence level syntax deficiencies. Their progress in grammar skills is evident in their 11% increase on their grammar diagnostic test. While scores on the pre-test averaged 40.9%, this average had risen to 51.9% by semester’s end. Although this final score still suggests low grammar proficiency, it nonetheless shows that students made significant progress. Further, ESL students commonly manifest some deficiencies in grammar when compared to native speakers.

**Goal 2: To align course content with the standardized ENGL105S/105 curriculum.**

**Progress:** In Spring 2013, students in the ESL curriculum followed a course scaffold that more closely aligned with the standardized 105 curriculum, which saw them completing six formal papers that included two 1-paragraph structures, two 2-paragraph structures, and two 4-6 paragraph essays. In addition, the ESL course was run as a four-credit class that included a supplemental grammar lab, similar to the standard ENGL105S structure.

The ESL instructor concluded that students were able to handle the curriculum changes and the transition to essay writing and provided their consistent assignment grades as proof. Although the grades stayed about the same throughout the semester (79% on the first one paragraph assignment, and 80% on the final essay), the ESL instructor felt this showed that students were able to transition smoothly from shorter to longer assignments.

Despite the ESL instructor’s assessment of the ESL students’ compositions, the Writing Specialists found the final essay submissions and evaluation of that work very troubling. To put it simply, not one of the five submitted essays would have earned a passing grade in either ENGL105 or ENGL105S. The ESL students did not exhibit basic mastery in the most fundamental aspects of clear composition and argument essays, which is vital to their success in ENGL107 where this is the primary mode of academic writing. Although the discrepancy in course content for the ENGL105ES section was remedied, it does not appear that the students were held to the same standard of writing proficiency as other ENGL105/105S students.

**IV. ENGL105ES Key Assessments**

**Assessment 1: Student Performance**

***Target Topic: Grade Progress***

**Data:**

**Analysis:** The students who completed ENGL105ES maintained consistent grades throughout the semester, remaining in the C+/B- range for all formal assignments. They even earned an average of 79.4%, or C+, on the in-class test, the Cover Letter assignment, but that was because they were allowed to revise the assignment outside of class. The generous revision policy is the biggest factor explaining these grades, given ENGL105ES students’ poor performance on the grammar diagnostic tests. Students would submit their assignments to the instructor and revise based on her feedback; in addition, they were required to go to the Writing Center to receive additional feedback to further improve their compositions.

It is questionable how students could perform so poorly on the grammar diagnostic tests and still earn, on average, C+ or higher grades on all of their formal writing assignments. It is also unusual that students would earn such high grades on their first assignment and seemingly encounter very little, or no, difficulty on more complex and lengthier assignments. Given the quality of the work submitted in the final essays, which is the only set of papers the Writing Specialists were able to review, the Writing Specialists are not confident that the ESL instructor was utilizing the assessment tools (the established rubric) provided to evaluate student work accurately.

**Assessment 2: Retention and Course Abandonment**

***Target Topic: Retention and Abandonment of ENGL105ES***

**Data:**

|  |
| --- |
| **Retention Rate for ENGL105ES** |
| **Students from Fall 2012****who failed** | **# re-enrolled in ENGL105ES** | **# re-enrolled in ENGL105** | **% Students Retained** |
| 11 | 6 | 3 | 82% |

|  |
| --- |
| **Pass Rate for Repeaters in ENGL105ES** |
| **Number and Percent of Class** | **Abandoned** | **Withdrawn** | **Completed & Failed** | **Passed** |
| Total number of repeaters = 6 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| 100% of  ENGL105ES students | 17% | 0% | 0% | 83% |

**Analysis:** Overall, retention for repeat ENGL105ES students was high; however, the retention rate is slightly more complicated than just a simple percent. While every student in Fall 2012 failed the course (11 students), nine students re-enrolled; however, not all of these students felt comfortable re-enrolling in an ES section. Therefore, three of the repeaters opted to take ENGL105, which does not include a supplemental grammar lab. Two out of these three students passed ENGL105, while one failed.

Of the six students who re-enrolled in ENGL105ES, five passed the course; only one student abandoned. ESL students have a demonstrably high persistence rate, which explains why so many of them completed and passed the course on the second attempt.

**V. Conclusion**

The addition of the ESL section to the ENGL105 program was meant to better serve students with greater writing deficiencies by targeting their specific second-language needs while accelerating their progression through the first-year writing program. The goal was for these students to maintain the same pace as traditional ENGL105/105S students by completing remediation within one semester.

However, after two semesters of adjustments to ENGL105ES, it is evident that adding any course to the first-year writing program to serve students with a lower skill set will require much more research and curricular development before it can be successfully implemented. Moreover, it might not be reasonable to expect these students to remediate all of their writing deficiencies in one semester of instruction while also introducing them to more complex rhetorical concepts and sophisticated academic compositions.

Since the majority of the ENGL105ES students passed this course, it is important to monitor their success rate in ENGL107 and use this data when evaluating the course of action for any lower-level iteration of the developmental writing program.

**IV. Appendix – Student Final Essays**

Attached are samples of the ENGL105ES final essays for review. The samples include the first page of each essay with the student name removed. The instructor’s commentary was minimal and only present on the first page; the ENGL105 program grading rubric was not attached to any paper.