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Jonathan Bush
Western Michigan University

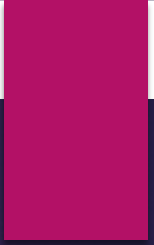
Adrienne Redding
Western Michigan University

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One-on-one 'Intensive' First-Year Writing Instruction: Partnering for Student Success

ADRIENNE REDDING & JONATHAN BUSH

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

The 'Intensive': A Brief History

- ▶ 2014: Started as response to a difficult student situation in a first-year writing course.
- ▶ We realized that this situation was emblematic of larger issue and a general model developed.
- ▶ We hired two term-instructors (both recent PhDs from our program) who developed a formal curriculum and administrative structures for program.
- ▶ Refined and developed program practices and procedures in response to situations and student needs.

The 'Intensive': A Brief History (cont.)

- ▶ Program has now served approximately 230 students over past 8 semesters (approximately 25-30 per semester).
- ▶ Over 200 have passed first-year writing (all would have failed course).
- ▶ Currently includes two full-time faculty (as part of course load) and one part-time instructor (and a graduate assistant).
- ▶ We teach the courses 'in-load' with the support of our college and department.

Nuts & Bolts: The Need

- ▶ More than 1,200 students take our ENGL 1050 each academic year.
- ▶ Often, 10% of those students fail to receive the grade (C or better) required to pass.
- ▶ These students represent a high drop-out risk.
- ▶ A meaningful percentage of these at risk students might benefit academically and personally AND be retained for the University by the appropriate intervention.

Nuts & Bolts: Mission Statement

- ▶ The ENGL 1050 Intensive provides **one-on-one** instruction to students who desire to learn and be successful but have **experienced addressable challenges** in their regular classroom environment with the primary goal of facilitating their **passing of ENGL 1050**, and the additional goal of increasing student retention by **providing tools for continued overall academic success.**

Nuts & Bolts: The Process

- ▶ Instructors are asked at midterm to refer students in danger of failing.
- ▶ We send referred students Survey Monkey applications via email.
- ▶ Students apply and are taken on by a faculty partner
- ▶ Students meet twice weekly with their faculty partner for both individual instruction and small group library research/writing sessions.
- ▶ They receive a BINDER which contains all the information they need to be successful in the course.
- ▶ In approximately 7 weeks students complete 4 writing tasks.
 - ▶ Research Proposal, Annotated Bibliography, Research Paper, and Reflective Survey

An Apprenticeship Opportunity

First benefit: the way it can function as an apprenticeship opportunity, affording students a personal relationship with a faculty member who can model the Academic Discourse Community, which as James Gee explains, provides beneficial enculturation exposure.

An Apprenticeship Opportunity

- ▶ “Discourses are not mastered by overt instruction (even less so than languages, and hardly anyone ever fluently acquired a second language sitting in a classroom), but by enculturation (“apprenticeship”) into social practices through scaffolded and supported interaction with people who have already mastered the Discourse.” - Gee

Modeling the act of joining on ongoing conversation

Second benefit: the way it models academic writing as the act of joining an ongoing conversation by facilitating regular conversation opportunities between the student and their faculty partner.

Modeling the act of joining on ongoing conversation

- ▶ “Given how we usually interact with school texts, we think you will agree that it is not such a commonsense idea to say that scholarly texts are people talking to each other in an ongoing conversation. But that is what is happening” - Wardle and Downs

Listening to the voices of first-year writers

Third benefit: the way the one-on-one format allows us to really hear our students and learn the factors that are impacting their lives, Our Intensive Program and its one-on-one conversational format allows us not only to discover the factors powerfully impacting our students, but also to allow the academic writing “conversation” that we help the students join, to incorporate these factors, making the written dialogues the students are asked to produce feel purposeful, informative, and engaging.

Listening to the voices of first-year writers

- ▶ “...knowledge about their histories, social situations, cultural backgrounds, class positions, material situations, learning styles, affective predicaments, and psychic states.... [I]t means understanding *enough* about students’ experiences as literacy learners and users to be able to infer what is at stake for them in pedagogical transactions of various kinds”
- Lindquist

Listening to the voices of first-year writers

- ▶ “As such, a kairotic pedagogy does not focus on preventing students from leaving, but instead assumes that some may leave, and further, sees the potential for teaching and learning in the very reasons they might leave (family obligations, changes in priorities or goals, physical or mental illness, and so on).”
- Reichart Powell

A Model for the Conversational Path:

- ▶ 1. What's important TO YOU to talk about?
- ▶ 2. What do you know about this idea and what others are saying about it?
- ▶ 3. Who do you wish could hear you?
- ▶ 4. What do you want them to know?

Our Students: (Mostly) not remedial

- ▶ **Why do students come to the Intensive program?**
- ▶ We started with a belief that our archetype would be a 'slacker,' someone who followed the stereotypical path of a student who partied, missed class, etc.
- ▶ Our preconception was wrong.
- ▶ Most students come with other issues that get in the way of their success.

Who accepts our invitations?

- ▶ **Less than 1/2 of students recommended will reply to our invitation.**
- ▶ Those that do respond are typically
 - ▶ willing to take action to improve their situation (refuse to be acted upon)
 - ▶ Able to recognize a good opportunity
 - ▶ Willing to reflect on their own errors and issues (and not blame the instructors or circumstances)

What gets students recommended?

- ▶ Are typically considered unable to pass their first-year composition course at mid-semester.
- ▶ Primary reasons cited by instructors: **attendance** and **missing work**
- ▶ Ideally, the instructor believes that the student has the ability, in the right situation, to show writing competency (**We're still working on this with instructors**)
- ▶ High representation of 'first-generation' students. (~90%)
- ▶ Higher representation than general student body for students from underrepresented minorities. (~66%)

Why 'Intensive?': Typical Student Traits #1

- ▶ Emotional Issues (Anxiety, Homesickness, Belonging, Adjustment, Cultural Acclimation, Depression)
- ▶ Learning Disabilities (ADHD, dyslexia, concentration, language processing, executive functioning [organization], memory)
- ▶ Medication Issues (often leading to absences and/or poor performance)
- ▶ More debilitating/significant mental illness (sleep disorders, manic-depressive, clinical depression, schizophrenia)
- ▶ Personal Illness, leading to excessive absences
- ▶ Autism
- ▶ Writers' Block
- ▶ Significant responsibilities outside of class (Often, a family illness or family crisis)

Why 'Intensive?': Typical Student Traits #2

- ▶ Highly intelligent oddballs who just don't fit into a regular class
- ▶ Dislike of communal/social pedagogy ("I just don't like groups!")
- ▶ Highly committed to other things (actors, athletes, leaders, community organizers, students in highly demanding courses for major)
- ▶ International Students (Some: Good writers – L2 issues; others with typical native speaking student issues)
- ▶ Difficult family and social histories (foster care, juvenile criminal histories, expulsions, experience with family court and social workers)

And two more (less common, but present)

- ▶ Lack of academic preparation or experience
- ▶ And, very occasionally, the stereotypical **middle-class slacker** who sees a good way to stay in school.

Student A: 'Colton'

- ▶ Highly intelligent, but deeply distrustful of authority; history of foster care, familial neglect and abuse, and institutional living. 2nd try at the course. History of conflict with instructors and students in class.
- ▶ Describes himself as being from a mixed-race family with extensive roots in his hometown. He and his siblings have been cared for/raised by various relatives
- ▶ Former member of Honors College (asked to leave due to grade and conduct issues). Diagnosed with multiple disorders as adolescent; Wants to spend his career reforming the foster care system.
- ▶ Came with a commitment to an ongoing project (an 'opus!') on the problems of the American foster care system.
- ▶ Clearly had the ability to write fluently and passionately. Became bogged down in too much research
- ▶ Couldn't write because he "had too much to say." Nothing was good enough. Would write and throw out work in frustration. Wouldn't turn in his work regularly.

'Colton' What We Did

- ▶ We settled on a limited project (he wasn't going to solve the entire problem in a first-year paper).
 - ▶ An Executive Summary (No more than 4 pages, single-spaced): Problem, Discussion, Case-Studies, Actions
 - ▶ An Annotated Bibliography of Key Sources (No more than 15)
- ▶ Partnership: We spent approx. 1/2 our meeting times talking – ranting and listening
- ▶ Negotiation: The paper needed to meet set deadlines. It needed to stay short. It was the starting point for his ongoing life's project.
- ▶ **Result:** Painful and difficult, but generally successful. He turned in the project just on time and expressed his disgust with it, but saw it as a step to his much better long-term project. He passed the class.

Student B: 'Shana'

- ▶ She barely passed my Developmental Writing course her first semester at the University. She would sit at her desk without any materials, looking down at the desktop. She found some fluency in the final project, a motivational PowerPoint, which allowed her to write about quotes she found inspirational, combine these quotes with photography she produced herself, for an audience of her family/kin.
- ▶ She was referred to the Intensive due to problems in her first-year-writing course, but didn't apply to participate.
- ▶ I contacted her because I'd taught her before and she agreed to work with me one-on-one.
- ▶ After painstaking work to re-establish rapport, our conversation resulted in her expression of a desire to investigate the State prison system. (Her father was currently incarcerated.)

“Shana’ What We Did

- ▶ She decided to investigate prison counselors and the services and benefits they were meant to provide to prisoners.
- ▶ She had two conversations with her father specifically regarding his experience and it seemed meaningful, and enlightening to her that this could be part of her research.
- ▶ Her writing process was slow and arduous. We would brainstorm a paragraph topic sentence and I would leave her to write everything she thought connected to that main idea, stressing that she not self-edit or worry about technical issues. Sometimes an hour of struggling would produce 3-4 sentences.
- ▶ Over weeks of talking with me as she wrote, she produced enough writing to create a basic essay.

Student C: 'Jermaine'

- ▶ Jermaine is in the BFA program (acting). He is in several productions on campus while in class and has auditioned for multiple community productions.
- ▶ He is sophomore who has done (relatively) well in other classes, but had attempted first year writing twice already and not succeeded (one drop; one failure).
- ▶ He says he is just 'too distracted' for class and can't find time in his schedule sometimes for work.
- ▶ He admitted that he just didn't care all that much for English work and that he really didn't prioritize it in his education.

'Jermaine' What We Did

- ▶ My message to him was generally to 'put English in your rear view mirror.' as in get it done, so you can move onto things you care about.
- ▶ He wrote a project that connected his coursework with his artistic career, asking the question "Why should we fund the arts?"
- ▶ He included traditional research along with interviews of peers and faculty.
- ▶ His initial draft was done early and revised early and effectively. I gave him the choice of continuing to revise for a higher grade.
- ▶ He continued to work on his project for two more weeks (until finals week). Final paper was appropriate and well-written. After consideration, he received a grade higher than C (C/B).

Working with Students: Some Frustrations!

- ▶ Not all our students are successful. The traits and issues that brought them to us can be seen in their work with us, including things such as
 - ▶ Missing or cancelling meetings at the last minute
 - ▶ Poor communication skills, especially in email
 - ▶ Sudden family or personal emergencies
 - ▶ Dubious excuses
 - ▶ Missed deadlines
 - ▶ Coping mechanisms (pretending to understand and then not being able to follow-up with their work)
 - ▶ Other similar issues – organization, procrastination, poor notetaking, lack of follow-up, inability to follow directions, lack of attention to detail, etc.

We have learned to be patient, but also remain professional and rigorous. If a student misses too many meetings (typically two), falls behind or isn't making satisfactory progress, he/she is dismissed from the program.

The Effect: Some Statistics

- ▶ In a typical semester, we work with 28-32 students (split among 3 instructors).
- ▶ Approximately 90% of these student pass our program and receive credit. **All would have failed without intervention.**
- ▶ Students who fail our 1st year writing course typically have a 33% retention rate (WMU average: 78%)
- ▶ Retention among those who we work with - typically 64-66%
- ▶ 2016-2017 Effect: Raised WMU1st/2nd year retention 0.7% (overall) and 1.6% among first-year writing students

Ongoing Initiatives

- ▶ Additional statistical analysis
- ▶ Increasing application rate among recommended students and assessing why students don't respond
- ▶ Increasing capacity by engaging other full-time faculty to work with smaller numbers of students as additional side-projects (1-2 students per faculty)
- ▶ Planning for non-interventional first-year writing section using one-on-one model