

Final Report Skills4Success: English Faculty Inquiry Group

Executive Summary:

The English Faculty Inquiry Group (FIG), whose members included Jennifer Brezina, Jia-Yi Cheng-Levine, Kim Gurnee, Lisa Helfrich, Mary Petersen, Tracey Sherard, Leslie St. Martin, and Alene Terzian, met once a week during the summer to address the success, retention, and persistence of students completing the English course sequence.

The group began by researching methodologies, pedagogies and best practices from other college campuses to determine how best to help students at College of the Canyons succeed. These research materials were compiled and analyzed by the FIG, and a course of action was determined. The English FIG concluded that a survey was needed to help the English department better understand and improve their existing program. The members of the FIG created and distributed this survey to 071, 081, 091 and 101 summer session classes, asking students to identify challenges and to indicate what types of workshops they would attend. Once the survey was tabulated, the FIG analyzed the results and drafted several Supplemental Instruction Workshops, addressing the reading and writing needs of students as indicated on the survey. These 50-minute paid workshops, housed in BONH-203, will be taught by faculty members and will address a wide range of topics that students deemed challenging. A request has been sent to English faculty to select workshops they would be interested to teach in the fall of 2009.

The FIG also determined that creating a Writing Center would greatly improve student success. Although the implementation of a Writing Center has been a topic of discussion in the English department for quite some time, the FIG determined that a Writing Center be put in place in the fall of 2009. Housed in the TLC, the Writing Center will offer students one-on-one tutoring and guided learning activities that will strengthen students' reading, writing and study skills. The FIG developed both Mission and Vision statements for the Writing Center, focusing on active learning strategies to promote lifelong learning.

Logistically, the Writing Center will be overseen by a Writing Center Coordinator who will be selected after an application process and might possibly have overlapping duties with the Writing Center Committee Chair. The existing TLC structure will facilitate and manage the logistics of Supplemental Instruction and Writing Center attendance.

Overall, the FIG has determined that both the Writing Center and Supplemental instruction will offer a variety of learning tools to improve student success in completing the English course sequence.

Introduction:

A recent study analyzing the success, retention and persistence of students completing the English course sequence has determined the approximate success rate of these students to be around 60%. This has prompted the English department to investigate the barriers that are preventing students from passing these classes. Because student success rates are a priority, it is

critical to formulate a course of action that can help students reach their goals. The English FIG has determined that students need supplemental instruction and a Writing Center, which will help them overcome the barriers to success.

Methodology:

The English FIG met every week during the summer session to address the concerns of student success. At the first FIG meeting, once roles were assigned to individual members, the committee was asked to research best practices at other institutions to see what was needed to improve our program. Several members presented research that outlined best practices, theory, curriculum development and staffing from other campuses, such as Woodbury, Sacramento City College, LA Valley College, and Marquette University. This research was used to develop our own best practices for the Writing Center (see Appendix A).

Upon analyzing the research, the English FIG determined that a survey was needed to help the English department better understand and improve their existing program (see Appendix B). The FIG compiled a survey that was administered to students taking English 071, 081, 091 and 101 classes at College of the Canyons during the Summer 2009 term. The purpose of this survey was to obtain information about how the English department can improve the program by developing a Reading and Writing Center to offer additional services to students, which has been a goal of the English department for many years. The first half of the survey asked students to identify certain skills that were deemed “challenging,” and the second half asked students to identify what workshops they would attend and from whom they might seek help.

Findings:

The 13-question English Department Student Survey found that students were interested in attending free 50-minute workshops to improve their English skills in both reading and writing. Students also identified significant challenges that were impeding their progress, such as getting started, citing sources, time management, and timed writing. They also indicated a strong interest in attending the writing center to receive one-on-one help (see Appendix C).

Once the surveys were calculated, the data was analyzed by the FIG and used to develop curriculum for Supplemental Instruction workshops. In the survey, it was determined that the willingness to attend workshops was fairly consistent even though assessment of individual skills varied. Students indicated a need for certain skills, which were then incorporated into the Supplemental Instruction curriculum.

The FIG members were then assigned to write drafts of Supplemental Instruction workshops, ranging from “Writing a Thesis Statement” to “Avoiding Plagiarism: part I” (see appendix D: sample workshops). Several workshops also focused on improving grammar and citation skills. FIG members presented 12 English Supplemental Instruction drafts and after some discussion and revision, the curriculum was approved and an overall schedule of workshops for Fall 2009 was compiled and presented to the FIG. Currently, faculty members, both full-time and adjunct, are being asked to teach these workshops in the fall.

After meeting with Mojdeh Mahn, the director of the TLC, the FIG determined that the Writing Center space should be housed in the TLC to make the program more manageable and

efficient. Workshops can be held in BONH-203, adjacent to the TLC, and we can utilize TLC resources to improve our program. The FIG determined that it is critical for a Writing Center Coordinator to be identified quickly so that the Writing Center can function more effectively. The issue will be raised at the English Department Retreat and voted on by the first Department Meeting. The coordinators for our course sequences should also be in close contact with the Writing Center Coordinator. The FIG also determined that faculty/tutors must engage students in guided learning activities for maximum effectiveness. These guided learning activities are being written and must take into consideration students whose schedules could conflict with Supplemental Instruction's offerings.

The FIG was then asked to determine a name for the center, and an email was sent to the English department, requesting name suggestions; this issue is still pending. A Mission Statement draft was composed that states the following: *The Writing Center at College of the Canyons provides supplemental instruction in reading, writing, and study skills at no cost to students of all skill levels in order to improve student success in English courses and in courses across the curriculum. In workshops, guided learning activities, study groups, and individualized tutoring sessions, students use active learning strategies to master and apply the skills required in their academic work and to promote lifelong learning* (see appendix E).

Also, a Vision Statement was drafted to address what the program wants to become in the future. This reads: *The Writing Center at College of the Canyons is dedicated to providing a dynamic program of supplemental instruction for students of all skill levels who can benefit from assistance outside of the classroom. By employing time-tested "best practices" and innovative methods, the Writing Center strives to strengthen students' writing, reading, and study skills in order to promote their immediate and long-term success* (See appendix E). These statements have helped focus our efforts, intentions, and best practices.

CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS:

The English FIG concluded that meeting student expectations by providing small workshops, one-on-one instruction, and guided learning activities is critical. Upon evaluating the data, the need for a Writing Center and Supplemental Instruction is evident. Based on a 60% success rate and the findings of the FIG's student surveys, the FIG has determined that students need more instruction to help them successfully complete the English course sequence. As evidenced by the student survey, only 12% of students felt very confident in their writing skills and identified the need for further instruction. Therefore, the new Writing Center, housed in the TLC, will afford students the opportunity to take ownership of their writing and learning practices. The Writing Center and Supplemental Instruction Workshops can help bridge the gap for students who are struggling through the course sequence and can offer them valuable tools to achieve success.

The English FIG recommends that the Writing Center be available and fully functional by the fall semester of 2009. The FIG determined that a Writing Center Coordinator must be selected, with a stipend of \$2000/semester, through an application process; a job description is being written that will clarify her/his tasks. As mentioned in the Mission Statement, the Writing Center can promote lifelong learning through workshops, guided activities, study groups and individualized tutoring sessions. Overall, the Writing Center, working with both the TLC and Supplemental Instruction, will be an additional resource to aid in student success.

