

Date: March 24, 2009  
To: Provost Mark Padilla  
From: Jean S. Filetti, Chair  
English Department  
Subject: Report on English 123/ULLC 100 and SACS QEP

On February 17, 2009, an ad hoc committee (Roark Mulligan, Mary Wright, and Jean Filetti) met with Tracey Schwarze, Deb Moore (Assessment), and Lori Underwood (representative for ULLC 100) to exchange information on the SACS Quality Enhancement Plan as tied to ULLC 100 and to begin assessing how/if the QEP objectives might be incorporated into English 123. Following that meeting, on March 3, 2009, the entire English Department met with Deb Moore and Bill Connell (representative for ULLC 100) to gain further clarity on the FYSM (ULLC 100) and how it is responding to the QEP. Based on these discussions and data forwarded by Carol Safko regarding the number of students who receive credit for English 123, the ad hoc committee offers the following report.

#### QEP Objectives

The QEP Objectives and English 123's objectives outlined below are, in essence, the same. Therefore, the committee feels confident that students taking English 123 receive solid grounding in analysis, evaluation, and synthesis as required by the SACS QEP.

QEP Objectives (1<sup>st</sup> Monitoring Report to SACSCOC, 3 Sept. 2008, pp. 13-14)

Students will:

- a. paraphrase argumentative and explanatory passages in their own words (**analysis**)
- b. identify evidence and conclusions in argumentative discourse (**analysis**)
- c. recognize poor versus strong evidence and be able to explain the differences according to reliability and relevance (**evaluation**)
- d. evaluate the effect of counter evidence and/or counter arguments on the strength of a piece of argumentative discourse (**evaluation**)
- e. assess the relevance of context to the strength of an argument (**evaluation**)
- f. develop and defend their own view using evidence gathered from course materials and outside resources (**synthesis**)
- g. draw conclusions about which is the superior of competing positions based on available evidence and context (**synthesis**)

English 123 Objectives (University Writing Guide 2008-09)

Students will:

- a. engage in a variety of writing responses in order to practice effective paraphrasing, to avoid plagiarism, to recognize a variety of argument structures, to discern main points from secondary data, and to articulate ideas for later revision
- b. engage critically with a text, practice incorporating sources into writing, establish and manage tone and voice, and marshal valid evidence, such as logic, counter examples, opposition, and other argument elements.

### Assessment Instrument

Both ULLC 100 and English 123 assess the above objectives through a writing assignment given inside the course. Presently the ULLC writing assignment used for assessment purposes is positioned at the end of the course. The ad hoc committee supports the administering of a writing assignment near the end of English 123 that would function the same way the ULLC writing assignment does and allow the Director of Assessment to compare the students' critical thinking at the end of a semester of instruction with the ACT Critical Thinking Test administered to incoming freshmen during freshmen orientation.

Additionally, the committee believes that the development of a standardized prompt to be used in all sections of English 123 to direct the writing would provide greater consistency to the assessment than the individually developed and varied prompts presently used in ULLC 100.

Finally, because the assessment instrument used to measure the QEP objectives is a written assignment, English 123, which is centered on developing student skills in reading and **writing** about argument, empowers students to analyze arguments and to communicate that analysis in written products. The amount of writing and writing instruction in ULLC 100 is presently not uniform; therefore, English 123 is a more suitable course to measure the QEP objectives.

### Faculty Consistency and Training

Writing Program Director Mary Wright and Assistant Program Director Linda Gordon follow their predecessors' capable and comprehensive approaches of providing (a) consistent and constant oversight expected of the composition program, (b) guidance and support to faculty teaching English 123, and (c) opportunities for faculty development in teaching, service, and scholarship. Faculty members teaching in the program expect and receive stability and consistency from textbook selection, methodology, objectives, and supporting course materials. When problems occur in the classroom regarding discipline and plagiarism, for example, the director meets with the instructor and students to resolve issues. Additionally, faculty routinely receive statewide conference announcements and calls for papers, and the English Department's travel budget and the Department's various Educational Foundation Accounts often offset minor travel and conference presentations.

Those teaching ENGL 123 form a cohort of tenured, tenure-track, and restricted faculty that provides consistency and stability to the program and students. Within the six restricted faculty there has been virtually no turnover for at least the last ten years, and the most recently added members have been teaching for the last six.

At almost no cost, the program helps this cadre of faculty stay current on pedagogical issues in rhetoric and composition in a number of ways, such as offering brown bags in which faculty discuss articles, strategies, and developments; regular program meetings to adjust the course design and attendant materials; and in-house workshops on relevant issues such as but not limited to grading, invention, peer review, and revision. In addition, beginning in 2007 the program began partnering with Cengage Publishing to put on events in which well-known scholars in the field lead workshops for colleagues in the program, the department, the university, and

other statewide colleges and universities. In our inaugural fall 2007 event, we were honored to host Cheryl Glenn, former President of CCC (College Composition and Communication) and author of books through various presses, who spoke in the Washington Room of the DSU to a packed crowd of people from CNU, Longwood University, Old Dominion University, Mary Washington University, Thomas Nelson Community College, Tidewater Community College, and Radford University. In March 2009, celebrated author John Mauk will give a workshop on invention strategies, and we expect an even larger audience. These events provide low-cost opportunities for faculty development and networking, increase our reputation in the community, and sharpen our faculty's insights into writing and critical thinking approaches, and we believe these workshops will grow in popularity through the years. With university-level funding we could enhance faculty development and training further.

Finally, ongoing assessment forms a central component of the composition program. For well over 15 years the writing specialists in the English Department have contributed materials for program evaluation in at least six ways:

1. Diagnostic writing samples,
2. Midterm evaluations of teaching and student progress,
3. End of semester evaluations of student preparedness and progress,
4. Instructor responses to semester evaluations,
5. IDEA results, and
6. Program committee's commitment to responding to assessment tools.

#### Capturing the Majority of Incoming Freshmen

Both English 123 and ULLC 100 are presently taken by the majority of incoming freshmen. Although it is true that students may receive credit for English 123 through Advanced Placement, IB, or Cambridge International Examinations, data received from Carol Safko in March 2009 indicates that only 30 students in the Fall 2007 cohort and 28 students in the Fall 2008 cohort received credit for English 123. Furthermore, 15 of the 30 Fall 2007 cohort and 12 of the 28 Fall 2008 cohort were Honors students, who, with the implementation of the new Honors Program in the fall of 2009, will no longer be required to take ULLC 100. The ad hoc committee, therefore, does not see a discernible difference in the number of freshmen who would be assessed should the QEP assessment be positioned in English 123 rather than ULLC 100. Finally, it is possible that the English 123 prompt could be used by instructors of the Honors 100 classes, thus ensuring that those students' critical thinking skills are also assessed.

#### English 123 and ULLC 100 Similarities

In addition to the overlapping critical thinking objectives found in both courses, the instructors in English 123 have historically served as informal advisors to freshmen in the course and often set aside class time to discuss selecting a major, course registration, and other issues regarding academic progress. Similar to ULLC 100, English 123 also involves students in service and cultural events on campus and frequently ties these opportunities to writing assignments and classroom discussion. Therefore, other ULLC 100 course objectives are present in English 123 and would, thus, be preserved.

### Concluding Thoughts

Students learn critical thinking skills by reading and analyzing argument across the disciplines and by writing their own arguments. These critical reading and writing skills have always been at the heart of English 123. Accordingly, the English Department supports the ad hoc committee's report and willingly and enthusiastically embraces the positioning of the SACS QEP assessment of critical thinking in English 123.