

**PROGRESS REPORT FOR:
Directed Self-Placement Assessment Initiative:
A Look at How We Place Students in Freshman Writing
at Illinois State University**

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**IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
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BACKGROUND

In our original grant proposal we noted that the procedure for placing students into freshman composition courses at Illinois State University had recently undergone a significant change, moving from the submission of a writing sample by all incoming freshmen to the submission of writing samples from only those incoming freshmen with ACT-English sub-scores of 20 or less to the implementation of a new placement procedure, Directed Self-Placement (DSP).

Using the DSP process allows students to essentially choose their own most appropriate placements for freshman composition based on information about the course and what students need to be able to do to succeed in the course as provided by the Writing Programs. Students use this information and their own knowledge of their background in writing to make a determination regarding the most appropriate placement.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As we began our research, our most pressing question was: Is DSP an appropriate process to use for determining appropriate placements for freshman composition? In order to answer that question, however, we needed to answer some others. Specifically, we wanted to find out:

1. What percentage of freshmen successfully completed ENG 101 and 101.10 during the representative semesters (Fall 2000, Fall 2002, Fall 2003, Fall 2004)?
2. Were ISU freshmen more, less, or similarly successful in their ENG 101 and 101.10 courses following the implementation of DSP?
3. What percentage of students who participated in DSP during Preview 2003 followed the Writing Programs' recommendation for placement?
 - a.) Of those who followed the recommendation, what percentage was successful in the course they chose?
 - b.) Of those who did NOT follow the recommendation, what percentage was successful in the course they chose?
4. What percentage of students who participated in DSP during the summer of 2004 were successful in the course they chose?
5. What reasons did students identify for choosing the course they chose?

STATUS OF RESEARCH

By August 2005 we had finished collecting and begun analyzing the data we needed to answer the questions above. By January 2006, we had completed a preliminary analysis of the data. At this point we are still trying to determine exactly what our findings mean and to put them into some kind of form suitable for publication. We do have a very early draft of an article, which Brad Smith completed and used as a research project in a doctoral-level course on writing assessment and which we believe can be used as a stepping stone to a draft for publication. In addition, Principal Investigator Claire

Lamonica was able to offer a presentation re-capping some of the early findings of this research during the 2006 University Teaching & Learning Symposium.

OUTCOMES OF THE PROJECT

We initially set out to answer the following questions, and we were, in fact, able to address most or all of them, although not all findings were reported at the January Teaching Symposium, at which we discussed only those with the broadest audience appeal.

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We were also able to determine that, contrary to what one might expect, the number of days/week that the courses met was not a determining factor in student decisions about which course to take . . . at least not in most cases. In the summer of 2004, the first time they were asked to explain their reasoning, students offered the following criteria for course selections:

- Prior Experience (40%-explicit references to h.s. experiences)
- Perception of self as a writer
- Comfort level (with writing)
- ACT scores
- Course descriptions
- Feelings about subject/discipline
- Time spent in class
- Perceived course difficulty level
- Future plans
- Work habits
- Advice from others (parents, teachers, advisors, siblings)
- Class rank
- Program requirements (honors, Connections, etc.)

FUTURE WORK

In the years since being awarded this SoTL Grant, each member of our team has moved ahead, and none of us is in the same position s/he was at the time we wrote the grant

proposal. Claire Lamonica, Associate Director of Writing Programs in 2004, is now the Assistant Director of the Center for Teaching, Learning & Technology; Brad Smith has left ISU and moved to the state of Washington, where he is teaching freshman composition and continuing work toward his doctorate; and Janice Neuleib is now the Acting Director of English Education, rather than the Director of Writing Programs. Still, as we look to the future, we continue to explore potential publication outlets for our findings and anticipate completing a draft suitable for submission to one of these within the next 9-10 months.