

INTENSIVE ENGLISH 1A PILOT

Impact on Course Performance
Fall 2011 Participants



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Undergraduate Education Institutional Research Report

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Introduction

Nearly 50% of freshmen who matriculate to the University of California, Riverside are placed into preparatory writing courses (i.e., English 3, 4, and 5). Once the preparatory writing course (or courses) is completed, a student can enter the English composition series (English 1A, 1B, and 1C), required for all students to graduate.

Students enrolled at UC Riverside are required to satisfy the UC Entry Level Writing Requirement. Students can pass that requirement based on SAT/ACT scores, AP English exam scores, completion of English composition at another institution, or through passing the UC Analytical Writing Placement Exam (AWPE). Students who pass the UC Entry Level Writing Requirement are placed in the English composition series. Students who do not pass the UC Entry Level Writing Requirement are placed into a preparatory writing course.

The Analytical Writing Placement Exam (AWPE) is typically administered during the spring of an admitted student's senior year of high school. The AWPE appears to be an excellent diagnostic tool for measuring students' writing abilities. Students' AWPE essays are read with care and deliberation by an arsenal of writing lecturers across the UC system, but few tests have been conducted regarding its accuracy as a placement device.

In 2008-09, nearly 2,000 students were placed into either English 4 or 5. Surely, such a large segment of the freshman population must possess a varied set of writing skills, and some may perhaps have the potential to skip preparatory writing altogether. This sentiment led the Office of Undergraduate Education's Institutional

Research Office (UEIR) to ask whether additional information may be brought to bear on the placement process, and especially whether it might be possible to identify a segment of the preparatory writing students who could perform well in the first course (i.e., English 1A) of the college-level composition series. Soon thereafter, UEIR began using predictive modeling as a complement to the existing placement exam to identify students who were placed into a preparatory writing course with the potential to pass English 1A upon matriculation in the fall.

English 1A Pilot Course

To test whether students placed into preparatory English could pass English 1A, the University Writing Program designed an English 1A pilot course (English 1PA). English 1PA is similar in content to English 1A except it includes more academic support. Tutors were embedded in the classroom and students were required to attend weekly individualized tutorials outside of class time.

English 1PA Placement

Students earning a 6 on the AWPE and placed into English 5 were invited to participate in English 1PA. UEIR also tested a predictive probabilities model beginning in Fall 2009 to select students earning a 6 on the AWPE and placed into English 4 for inclusion in the pilot program. This model is described below.

Predictive Probabilities Model

We used a predictive probabilities model (PPM) to identify students with strong writing potential among those students placed in preparatory writing courses. The predictive probabilities model is a multivariate statistical model that uses the

final grades of students in English 1A, their student background information, and past academic performance (high school GPA and SAT scores) to create a model that will predict whether students placed into English preparatory courses are likely to pass English 1A. The estimated parameters of the model are then used for predictive purposes. The model is used to predict potential English 1A grades for students who score a 6 on the AWPE, just below the minimum score required for placement in English 1A. Students with the highest predicted grades in English 1A were invited to participate in the English 1 Pilot Program (English 1PA).

Past Results

In 2009, only English 5 students were invited to participate in English 1PA. In Fall 2009, 170 students placed into English 5 participated in the inaugural year of English 1PA. In Fall 2010, 249 students participated in English 1PA. Of this population, 212 were placed in English 5 and 37 were determined using PPM. Results of both terms indicate that students pass English 1PA at a similar rate as students passing English 1A. Additionally, students passing English 1PA pass English 1B at the same rate as students who take English 1A and move on to English 1B. When comparing the final course grades between English 1PA students and English 1A students, past findings indicate that English 1PA students earned slightly lower grades in the fall term than their English 1A counterparts. When students move on to English 1B, however, these findings showed no significant difference in final course grade between students who completed English 1PA instead of English 1A. These findings suggest that English 1PA prepares students to pass English 1B and is a valid alternative for students with AWPE scores that are not quite high enough to place them into English 1A.

Fall 2011

The current study replicates and extends this analysis for a new cohort of students. In Fall 2011, English 1PA serviced 211 students. Students placed into English 5 were automatically invited to participate in English 1PA. Students with high predicted English 1A grades using PPM were invited to participate in English 1PA as well. The study design and comparison of outcomes for the English 1A Pilot are discussed below.

Methodology

This quasi-experimental analysis compares the English 1A and 1B pass rates and average course grades of students who participated in the pilot English 1PA course (treatment group) and those who were directly placed into English 1A (control group). We also compare the pass rates and final course grades of students participating in English 1PA who were originally placed into English 5 and students selected to participate using PPM.

Sample Size and Data Source

Data were collected from official end of term student information data and course enrollment files for the fall 2011 and winter 2012 terms.

The sample consists of the following:

- Treatment: 211 students who participated in English 1PA in fall 2011
- Comparison: 1,125 students who enrolled English 1A in fall 2011.

We follow with a comparison of students invited into English 1PA using PPM and those placed into English 5 but invited into English 1PA:

- 146 students invited to English 1PA originally placed into English 5
- 65 students invited to English 1PA originally placed into English 4 but were identified to have potentially high final grades in English 1A using PPM.

Results

English 1PA and English 1A

Table 1.1 displays the pass rates for students taking English 1PA and students taking English 1A in fall 2011. A final grade of C or better constitutes a passing grade. Students who participated in the English 1PA course passed the course at the same rate as students enrolled in English 1A. Though the rate appears to be slightly lower, this difference is not statistically significant. We used logistic regression to determine if students in English 1PA passed their class at different rates than English 1A students when controlling for background characteristics. We found no difference in pass rates after we added these controls to the model.

Table 1.2 displays the average final course grades for students enrolled in English 1PA and English 1A. Students enrolled in English 1A earned significantly higher final course grades than students enrolled in English 1PA. We ran an ordinary least squares regression to determine if course grades differed when controlling for students' background characteristics. With controls, students in English 1PA still earned about 0.2 grade points lower than their English 1A counterparts. On average, students in English 1PA earned a C+ while students in English 1A earned a B-. While this difference is statistically significant, English 1PA students are still doing acceptably well in the course.

We also compared the pass rates and final course grades in English 1B between students who were placed in English 1PA and those who placed into English 1A. Table 2.1 displays the pass rates of English 1PA and English 1A students. We find that students taking English 1A pass English 1B in the winter at a higher rate (95.7%) than students taking English 1PA (90.3%). It should be noted that both courses prepare students to pass English 1B at least 90% of the time. This difference is statistically significant and continues to be statistically significant after we control for student background characteristics.

Table 2.2 displays the differences in English 1B average final course grades for students who took English 1PA versus those who took English 1A in the fall. We find that the average course grade for students who took English 1A (2.88) was significantly higher than the average course grade for students who took English 1PA (2.75). In both cases, these grades would be considered a B-. When we control for student background characteristics, we no longer find a significant difference in final English 1B course grades between the two groups.

Table 2.3 examines the difference between the rates of repeating English 1PA or English 1A in the winter for students who failed in the fall. English 1PA does have a significantly higher repeat rate (8.8%) than English 1A (4.9%). It should be noted that students who fail a course in the fall can opt to retake the course in any future quarter.

English 1PA Selection Differences

As noted above, students can be invited to participate in English 1PA by being placed in English 5 or through being placed in English 4 and having high predicted English 1 final grades. For ease of discussion, we will refer to these groups as English 5 and PPM respectively. Table 3.1 shows the difference in pass rates for students selected into English 1PA in different ways. We find that even though PPM-placed students pass at higher rates than English 5-placed students, this difference is not statistically significant even when controlling for student background characteristics.

Table 3.2 displays the average final English 1PA course grades for English 5-placed and PPM-placed students. Students placed into English 1PA using PPM earned significantly higher final grades (2.72) than students placed through English 5 (2.40). This difference is no longer statistically significant when controlling for student background characteristics. This suggests that the PPM approach is slightly preferable, but that groups achieve acceptable grades in English 1PA.

Discussion

Fall 2011 English 1PA Program participants passed English 1PA at the same rate as students placed into and passing English 1A. These students earn, on average, final course grades in the B range. As students passing both courses move on to English 1B in the winter, we find that English 1PA students pass English 1B at lower rates than their English 1A counterparts though both groups pass English 1B at least 90% of the time. English 1PA students earned grades in English 1B that are similar to English 1A prepared

students. Both groups, on average, earn grades in the B+ range in English 1B.

These findings demonstrate that a pool of students who place into preparatory writing courses have the potential to pass a college-level English composition course provided that they have some additional classroom support. At this time, the value-added for the inclusion of tutors and tutorials has not been examined in this study. Should we consider the expansion of English 1PA to service more students who may be capable of passing English 1A, the value-added of tutors and tutorials will be important to examine.

We also compared students placed into English 1PA in two different ways. Traditionally all students placing into English 5 are invited to participate in English 1PA. Students who place into English 4 can also be invited into English 1PA if they show a high probability of passing English 1A based on a predicted probability model. Our findings indicate that students invited into English 1PA through PPM pass at about the same rate and earn about the same average final grade in English 1PA as English 5-placed students when controlling for student background characteristics.

Overall, the English 1PA program has been successful in preparing its students to pass the English 1 writing sequence. Students experience high pass rates in both English 1PA and English 1B. This study indicates the desirability of continuing the program.

Table 1.1: Fall 2011 Comparison of English 1A and English 1PA Pass Rate

	Pass Rate	N
English 1PA	87.7%	211
English 1A	91.0%	1,125
	Pass Rate with Controls ^a	N
English 1PA compared to English 1A	Odds Ratio = 0.80	1,250

Table 1.2: Fall 2011 Comparison of English 1A and English 1PA Average Final Course Grade

	Average Final Course Grade	N
English 1PA	2.50*	211
English 1A	2.80*	1,125
	Average Course Grade with Controls	N
English 1PA compared to English 1A	b = -0.20*	1,250

* Statistically significant at the 0.05 level

^a Controlling for gender, ethnicity, college, high school GPA, SAT scores, low income status, first generation status, and Analytical Writing Placement Exam Score.

Table 2.1: Winter 2012 Comparison of English 1A and English 1PA Pass Rate in English 1B

	English 1B Pass Rate	N
English 1PA	90.3%*	103
English 1A	95.7%*	624
	English 1B Pass Rate with Controls ^a	N
English 1PA compared to English 1A	Odds Ratio=0.35*	684

Table 2.2: Winter 2012 Comparison of English 1A and English 1PA Average Final Course Grade in English 1B

	English 1B Average Course Grade	N
English 1PA	2.75*	103
English 1A	2.88*	624
	English 1B Average Course Grade with Controls	N
English 1PA compared to English 1A	b= -0.16	684

Table 2.3: Winter 2012 Comparison of Percentage of Students Retaking English 1A and English 1PA

	Students Retaking English 1A or English 1PA	N
English 1PA	8.8%*	215
English 1A	4.9%*	1,136

* Statistically significant at the 0.05 level

^a Controlling for gender, ethnicity, college, high school GPA, SAT scores, low income status, first generation status, and Analytical Writing Placement Exam Score.

Table 3.1: Fall 2011 English 1PA Pass Rate for Students Placed into English 1PA via English 5 or Predicted Probability Model (PPM)

	English 1PA Pass Rate	N
English 1PA placed from English 5	85.6%	146
English 1PA placed using PPM	92.3%	65
	English 1PA Pass Rate with Controls ^a	N
English 5 compared with PPM	Odds Ratio=2.32	206

Table 3.2: Fall 2011 English 1PA Comparison of Average Final Course Grade for Students Placed into English 1PA via English 5 or Predicted Probability Model

	English 1PA Average Course Grade	N
English 1PA placed from English 5	2.40*	146
English 1PA placed using PPM	2.72*	65
	English 1PA Average Course Grade with Controls	N
English 5 compared with PPM	b= -0.12	206

* Statistically significant at the 0.05 level

^a Controlling for gender, ethnicity, college, high school GPA, SAT scores, low income status, first generation status, and Analytical Writing Placement Exam Score.