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Free is Good: Designing and Implementing a Composition I Template Course with Help from an Affordable Learning Georgia (ALG) Grant

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Abstract

A multi-disciplinary team comprising veteran and early career instructors—composition and rhetoric specialists as well as literature professors—instructional designers, and students was awarded a grant from Affordable Learning Georgia to create a template 50% hybrid course. This course was developed to share with last minute hires assigned to teach hybrid versions of Composition 1. At our institution we define hybrid in three ways, with each definition referencing a week: 50% means the class meets face-to-face one day and online one day; 33% means the class meets face-to-face two days and online one day; 66% means the class meets face-to-face one day and online for what would be two class sessions. The team chose to use a low-cost textbook in the creation of the course and also integrated various other research-based elements that were shown to support student success. After analyzing the data regarding the success of the template, the team found that when using the template, limited-term and part-time colleagues had lower drop, fail, withdrawal, and incomplete rates. Sixteen percent more students passed the course.

Keywords: learning analytics, English composition, hybrid courses, open education, student success, template/master courses

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Introduction

This project begins, as all projects must, with a story. For years, the faculty in the English department at Kennesaw State University (KSU) has been widely opposed to providing template courses, also known as master courses or prebuilt courses, for faculty to teach from. The argument has been that faculty teach better when they teach their own courses and that providing template courses interferes with academic freedom and disrespects our colleagues' expertise, whether they be newly hired or veteran. We see the validity in this argument, and in an ideal world there would be no template courses, as all faculty would have the time, resources, support, and motivation to build their own.

However, at KSU, a change in university policy regarding online and hybrid courses meant that courses could not be taught until they went through an approval process, and that meant that faculty hired at the last minute to teach online or hybrid courses would have to be given pre-built, or template, courses, at least for their first semester teaching. This fact meant that the English department would need to come up with a template.

In addition to the university policy change, part of the rationale for the Composition 1 template course design was directly related to the department's need to provide high-quality courses that could be implemented for last-minute hires. Given KSU's growth over the past several years, limited-term and part-time colleagues are often hired within the last two weeks before a given semester, giving these colleagues little-to-no time to prepare a high-quality course before they begin to teach. Another advantage to template courses that influenced the project is the Department's need in leveraging a course design that is aligned to the first-year composition (FYC) program's

instructional guidelines (Appendix). Also, the FYC program relies heavily on hybrid courses to minimize the space issues with finding a classroom on campus. The template course we designed and taught in our pilot filled all of these needs.

Faculty who taught the Composition 1 template course in Fall 2022 represent a wide range of experience with teaching FYC. In fact, 80% had never taught a hybrid course before. Additionally, four faculty were new to KSU, while three were returning. These demographics presented a challenging but motivational opportunity regarding professional development and training for both KSU's learning management platform, Desire2Learn (D2L), and the Achieve learning system, which accompanies the low-cost *Everyday Writer* textbook used for the pilot version of this course.

Composition 1 (ENGL 1101 at our institution) is a ubiquitous course on college campuses. The learning outcomes for the course we created, which are likely similar to the learning outcomes for most Composition 1 courses, are as follows:

1. Practice writing in situations where print and/or electronic texts are used, examining why and how people choose to write using different technologies.
2. Interpret the explicit and implicit arguments of multiple styles of writing from diverse perspectives.
3. Practice social aspects of the writing process by critiquing your own work and the work of your colleagues.
4. Analyze how style, audience, social context, and purpose shape your writing in electronic and print spaces.
5. Craft diverse types of texts to extend your thinking and writerly voice across styles, audiences, and purposes.

Most first year students are required to take Composition 1. At KSU, this fact means that more than 250 sections each semester must be offered, and sometimes English faculty—part timers, limited-term, or graduate students—must step in at the last minute to teach a section. Key questions to ask are (1) how do we support those late hires and help them to offer high quality, 50% hybrid (meeting face-to-face one day a week and online asynchronous one day a week) and 33% hybrid (meeting face-to-face two days a week and online asynchronous one day a week) courses on such

short notice? And (2) how do we support our students by making sure all their courses are high quality and have important student success features? This was our challenge, and our solution was to first garner a grant from Affordable Learning Georgia (ALG) to support this project and second, to form a team to design and implement an effective template. We are using the term template to describe this pre-built course shell. In this case, template means completely designed hybrid course with the weekly, asynchronous portions completely built and the face-to-face portions addressed with a facilitator guide document. The facilitator guide document provides various options for conducting the face-to-face sessions, including PowerPoint presentations and classroom activities such as quiz show type games, and helps the instructor to connect the online and face-to-face portions of the course. In this way, the instructor can concentrate on teaching and grading, knowing that there is a support and guide helping both the instructor and students move through the course successfully.

Literature Review

In building this Composition 1 50% hybrid template course, we knew we wanted to integrate research-based student success features into the course. We found research both on how template courses support faculty success and on particular features of courses that support student success. We are defining faculty success as teaching a course effectively and helping students move through the course successfully. We are defining student success as improving outcomes for learning subject matter, progressing through the course, completing the course, passing the course, and moving toward graduation.

Best practices for resource integration include advice from subject matter experts (SMEs) from multiple disciplines. While every master or template course is not automatically superior just by the virtue of being a template course, high quality template courses can ensure a consistent and successful experience for students in online and hybrid courses. As Trammell et al. (2018) notes that

[A]s the use of contingent or adjunct instructors (part-time instructors, graduate students, and nontenure track appointments) approaches 70%

of classes, it is important that faculty and administrators find a way to ensure this academic rigor is present for adjunct instructors who may not have the expertise or permanency to do so. (p. 164)

Trammell et al.'s mention of permanency brings up another strong point in favor of a template. It seems hardly fair to ask a newly hired part-time faculty member to invest the additional time to build out an individual version of a course for no additional pay.

It was also important for us to identify the features of a high-quality template course. Gaddis (2022) notes that master classes, which we refer to as template courses, help solve the problem of inconsistency, including inconsistent quality, in online courses. Gaddis recommends template courses be designed using “backwards design,” “andragogy,” and “authentic assessments” (p. 105). Backwards design is a hallmark of successful online course design and practiced by our design team. We also are admirers of Paulo Freire and the importance of respecting the learners’ experiences, which is an aspect of andragogy. While some feel that authentic assessment is a challenge in English composition courses, our team would disagree. With assignments such as analyzing the rhetoric of advertisements and evaluating logical claims, we are able to help students see the value in the writing lessons practiced in Composition 1 for life beyond the classroom. The facilitator guides also include information for faculty to share with their classes on the real-world importance of these assignments. The facilitator guides also include discussion prompts that the faculty can use to engage students in discussion and share their own experiences with rhetoric, logic, analysis, and other topics required to successfully write the assigned papers.

In order to build the template course, we started with a low-cost textbook for our 50% hybrid course design. Colvard, Watson, and Park’s (2018) well-known work on open educational resources and student success put us on the path to search for a low-cost or no-cost option. While at first we believed the benefits of the data analytics features in the low-cost option made it worth the price, we have since created a no-cost version of our course using *Writing Guide with Handbook* (<https://openstax.org/details/books/writing-guide>) by Openstax to provide choice to instructors adopting the template. Colvard, Watson, and Park found OER “level the academic playing field”

for students (p. 273), especially those who might need extra support in the realm of student success. We also wanted to think outside the box a bit. In Arulkadacham et al. (2021), one of the main findings in their work on student success was the need for self-care resources among online students. Having technological skills, an orientation to the course, an opportunity for student-student contact and student-teacher contact, and resources to support student learning were all named as predictors of success in a course (p. 5). For this reason, the course included an orientation module, links to important campus resources, and frequent reminders to ask the instructor if there were questions. Trammell et al. (2013) further observes “Separating course content and assignments into units or modules allows students to conceptually organize information and complete work in a timely manner” (p. 165). For this reason, the course was organized into weekly modules to assist both faculty and students in managing their time, keeping up with the course, and planning each week.

Given that one of the perceived audiences for this template would be newly hired faculty, we wanted to be conscious of the faculty workload we built into the course. In “Where We Are: Writing Initiatives Designed to Support Well-Being: Facilitating Well-Being in a Pandemic through Writing Course Innovation,” Macklin et al. (2022) found that the persons adopting the template course they created (TAs in this case) felt that they were working more than the assigned 20 hours a week. This overwork concerned them, as they wanted to be mindful of the grading load (p. 202), as did we when we created the interactive exercises in lieu of discussion boards. Some feel that “[d]iscussion is an essential dimension of human learning,” and discussion boards are essential because, “[w]ithin asynchronous online courses, the discussion board essentially replaces face-to-face interaction in the brick and mortar classroom,” (Borgemenke, Hold, & Fish, 2013, p. 19). We agree that that may be true in some cases; however, we tried to balance the importance of discussion with innovative, interactive features in the course in order to lessen the grading load on the instructors teaching with the template.

Our thinking was thus: one of the primary audiences for this course would be late hires. This person may even be hired to teach five sections of this course. Until this template course was created, this new hire could very

possibly be given a textbook, access to our learning management system, and a sample syllabus, and maybe a quick explanation of how hybrid courses are defined at our institution. And that was it. No matter how talented this new hire might be, it's very difficult to learn a new institution and whip up a composition course in hybrid format in a short amount of time. The template course, then, serves to assist the new hire in seeing the expectations of faculty teaching Composition 1 and also helps to ensure the students have a consistent and successful experience. Given that this faculty member may be teaching five sections of this course, and there are weekly face-to-face meetings each week, we didn't want to overburden the new faculty member with grading weekly discussions on top of grading papers, rough drafts, and assignments. To this end, our team used interactive presentation software (specifically Genially and Articulate Storyline 360) to deliver interactive, self-graded presentations to students on key topics such as rhetorical strategies, the writing process, and addressing style and audience. These presentations allowed students to get the interaction we wanted them to have (not always possible on discussion board assignments) without the instructor having to grade or monitor the experience. After instructors teach with the template course once, they are encouraged to build their own versions of Composition 1, and they may at that time choose to build back in discussion board assignments that specifically support their teaching goals and methods.

Our First Year Composition team holds Mary-Ann Winkelmes' work with Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT) in high regard and also incorporated aspects of TILT-ed practices, including practice activities to support confidence in learning and clear explanations of the rationale behind various assignments (Winkelmes, 2019, p. 19). For this reason, many of the learning materials and subject matter expert videos share not only how an activity will benefit the student in the class but also how these skills will be valuable in the future. In addition, the template course includes practice exercises to help students gauge their own learning, interactive activities to help students stay engaged with the content, guided and interactive presentations to give students individual experiences while engaging with the content, friendly videos from our subject matter experts to explain more complex concepts, clear assignment guidelines with grading rubrics, and navigational guides to support students successfully completing every module.

On a final note, and at a higher level of organization, according to Newell et al. (2021), scaffolding assignments supports student success by helping students to work on one skill at a time that builds up to mastery of more complicated skills (p. 202). The template course included scaffolding activities such as prewriting exercises, rough drafts, and peer reviews to support students as they moved to create the final draft of each assignment. The low-cost textbook we chose for the original version of the course also included learning analytics software and adaptive quizzing features that set individual student learning goals and helped them to achieve them throughout the course.

Study Context and Demographics

KSU teacher-researchers working on the ALG project used a team-based approach and felt that it provided a deeper perspective when building the course. We also had a diverse team in our project, including five seasoned English instructors with backgrounds in both literature and composition and rhetoric, an instructional designer, and two students. The students were not English majors but rather one was majoring in education and the other in environmental science. We designed and implemented a high-quality Composition 1 course to be delivered in a 50% hybrid format (meeting one day a week and online asynchronous one day a week). Through the support provided by our ALG grant, we developed the course as a low-cost (less than \$40) alternative to courses with traditional textbooks. At KSU, Composition 1 textbooks can cost upwards of \$100. Our course design sought to demonstrate that effective instruction and affordability can be compatible and achieve university student success goals.

University Overview

Kennesaw State University is the third-largest institution of higher education in the state of Georgia. We are known for our strong academic programs and supportive learning environment. KSU offers 180 undergraduate and graduate degree programs across various disciplines, including business, education, engineering, humanities, and social sciences. More than 43,000 students are enrolled at KSU, almost 40% of whom are first-generation students.

The university prides itself on its commitment to student success and offers numerous resources to help students excel academically, including tutoring services, academic advising, and career development programs. Additionally, KSU values experiential learning and offers numerous opportunities for students to gain hands-on experience through internships, cooperative education programs, and research projects. Student success is at the core of KSU's mission, and this commitment begins with first-year courses such as Composition 1.

University Demographics

According to the Fall 2022 enrollment data, the student body at KSU is diverse and includes students from 47 states and 142 countries. The racial and ethnic makeup of the student body is as follows: 46% white, 25% Black/African American, 14% Hispanic/Latinx, 6% Asian, 3% international, and 5% multi-racial. The student body at KSU is 49% female and 51% male.

The university has a student-to-faculty ratio of 20:1 and employs over 1,800 faculty members, 88% of whom hold terminal degrees in their respective fields. KSU is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) and holds numerous programmatic accreditations from specialized accrediting bodies in various fields.

Description of the Project

We have already described the rationale for the project, the theoretical underpinnings, and the motivation and context. But how did it actually proceed? Two English Department faculty wrote the ALG grant to support the project. After being awarded the grant, two seasoned faculty were selected as faculty designers to build each weekly module, including the face-to-face class meeting facilitator's guide, the face-to-face class meeting student preparation guide, and the online course module. ALG requires that all deliverables be publicly available, as they must be truly open. For this reason, we built the weekly modules in SoftChalk so that they could be linked into a D2L section for university faculty and linked to a website to share with the world. SoftChalk served as our project management tool for this project, as we were able to share access to the modules across the

team. Another benefit of using SoftChalk is that for the life of the project, any updates or corrections made in the original SoftChalk modules will automatically update to all instances of the course using the links. This means anyone using the linked version of the course will always be using the latest version.

The instructional designer created the interactive, self-graded presentations on topics such as rhetorical analysis, style and audience, and the writing process. The faculty member managing the project inserted these into the SoftChalk modules and created the public-facing website. The student members of the team were also trained in online course accessibility, so they were able to provide a dual role. They were accessibility specialists, and they gave us feedback from a student perspective. We included a part time instructor on the grant to give us feedback on the facilitator guides; specifically, what would make them most helpful to part-time faculty adopting the course to teach. Our faculty member serving as the data analysis expert set up surveys and data collection opportunities. Finally, the faculty designers added syllabi, schedules, assignments, and rubrics into the learning management system and loaded the learning management system versions into zipped files. The zipped files were added to the department website, which made them available to all English department members. To support faculty adopting the templates, the First Year Composition director scheduled training sessions before the semester started.

It must be mentioned that the 50% hybrid runs in two formats: online for the first session and face-to-face for the second session each week (version 1), and the reverse (version 2). Hybrids are scheduled this way so that two classes can occupy the same physical space each week. In order to make the template work for both schedules, the faculty designers created an online “start here” module at the beginning of version 1 that was added into module 1. In version 2, the start here stands alone, so that the same module 1 serves as the online portion. In this way, the online modules serve as the same for version 1 and 2. Or, to put it another way, there was no need for the faculty designers to create two versions of the hybrid course. We simply adjusted the “Start Here” information so that whether a course started face-to-face or online on the first day, all were using the same online and face-to-face modules.

Finally, as mentioned above, a low-cost textbook was used for the initial version of this course. A version using the OpenStax *Writing Guide with Handbook* (<https://openstax.org/details/books/writing-guide>) was created a year later so that faculty could have a choice whether to adopt a low-cost or no-cost textbook.

Analysis and Discussion

In this section, we will discuss the context of the analysis and present the qualitative and quantitative results of the project.

Context for Course Analysis

In Fall 2022, we launched the Composition 1 template course in 26 sections taught by seven instructors. These instructors represented a wide range of experiences, with four new-to-teaching and three returning instructors from the previous year. The project co-PIs, both tenured professors, also taught the course.

For the qualitative data piece of the study, we surveyed 676 students in these sections, with 119 responding. This yielded a 18% response rate, which we believe to be a significant number to draw conclusions about learning experiences. We surveyed seven instructors who taught using the template course.

Quantitative Data Results

DFWI (drop, fail, withdraw, incomplete) Rates: Because Composition 1 is a gateway course, pass rates are important in terms of retention, progression, and graduation. For the template course pilot, we had 26 sections, resulting in an 18.4% overall DFWI rate. This rate was calculated using final grade submissions in KSU's Banner program and from Institutional Research. We compared our rate to the Fall 2022 overall Composition 1 rate, which was 20.3%. For limited-term and part-time (LT/PT) colleagues, the 2022 rate was 23%. LT/PT colleagues who used the template course had a combined DFWI rate of 17.3%, an improvement from 5.7% versus colleagues who did not. What this means practically is that, when using the template course, LT/PT colleagues had lower DFWI rates. Out of the 624 students taught by LT/PT colleagues, 516 students

passed (cumulative 82.7% PASS rate). As we compared DFWI rates, we understood that KSU's first-year writing program, of which Dr. Law is the director, has standardized learning objectives and program guidelines that allow instructors the freedom to customize major assignments within specified assignment types that are consistent and aligned in the curriculum. Knowing that the template courses were also designed with these guidelines and standard learning objectives/assignments in mind, our team felt that the analysis of DFWI data was reliable.

Overall, 18.4% of students, out of a total 676 students affected, dropped, failed, withdrew, or took an incomplete from the template courses during our initial study implementation. This number compares to the overall ENGL 1101 DFWI rate: just shy of 20.3%. While this percentage may seem small, we know that "moving the needle" on pass rates becomes an incremental enterprise when rates dip below 25%. We also know that, at an institution the size of KSU, every percentage point represents hundreds of students who now can progress along their general education pathway towards graduation.

Qualitative Results: Student Learning Experiences

Student success at the course level is a mixed methods initiative, with DFWI rates being key quantitative measures. While quantitative data pointing to retention, progression, and graduation (RPG) is certainly important in considerations of course design and delivery, our team also felt that the qualitative aspects of students' learning experiences were significant as we piloted the course and planned for future modifications. We conducted surveys and obtained feedback through point-of-need tech support during the semester. Foundational to student qualitative data reporting is a transparent, analytical process wherein our team conducted surveys in which we assessed the efficacy of the course design, pacing, and assignment structure through the lens of continuous improvement. All data collection and analysis were intended for course assessment.

Overall, students in the Composition 1 template courses reported positive learning experiences, especially in relation to the technology applications. Of the 119 students who responded to the survey, 80% of them reported that they were able to start the course easily and find course

materials quickly. Given the instructor feedback, which indicated a desire for more tech support in this area, students seemed to have no difficulties.

Our team designed the hybrid Composition 1 course to mindfully cultivate connections between online learning content and face-to-face interactions. Some of these pedagogical choices included adaptive quizzing, embedded videos, interactive activities, and student-to-student discussions, all organized to provide previews and snapshots of content delivered in face-to-face class meetings that came after each online module. We intentionally designed each weekly module to feed into the next and all online content to feed in-person learning. This part of the course design was remarkably successful, with only three of 119 students not seeing the connections between the online learning parts of the course and course goals/assignments.

Further key takeaways from our student surveys focused on ease-of-use and engagement with the low-cost textbook and Achieve platform. These results were mixed. Less than half of students navigated to the online textbook with no trouble, even though they could access the other course materials with ease. However, 30% of students felt that the Achieve diagnostics helped them execute a study plan that made them better writers at the end of the course. A textual trend among these students is evidenced in a representative quote:

Direction—a sense of direction. Something that I’ve always struggled with writing was I was never taught in a way that I was able to grasp the concept... whether that would be physically in class: video/ live (zoom) lecture/ presentation, online or a mix of. Though I believe it’s not just the study plan that determines the student’s success—It’s a mix of how the professor engages with the students, the material they teach in the in-class portion and how the professor teaches their course material coordinating with the online portion of it and the study guide that has been created.

We also learned that students wanted more practice or ungraded activities. The figure below further shows students’ clear preferences for adding more ungraded items to the course design. The course design had many low-stakes graded assignments (weekly) and only three major

assignments. Participation was also a graded item throughout the semester. We were intrigued that students wanted more ungraded opportunities to practice their skills.

Students were asked “Would you like to have more of the following in the course?” with answer choices being “Ungraded quizzes to test your knowledge,” “Discussions on the discussion board,” “Ungraded writing activities to provide practice on writing assignments,” “Small group exercises online,” “Something else (please share),” and “Nothing else.” As Figure 1 shows, out of 119 responses, the majority of students (51%) wanted ungraded quizzes to test their knowledge and ungraded writing activities to provide practice on writing assignments.

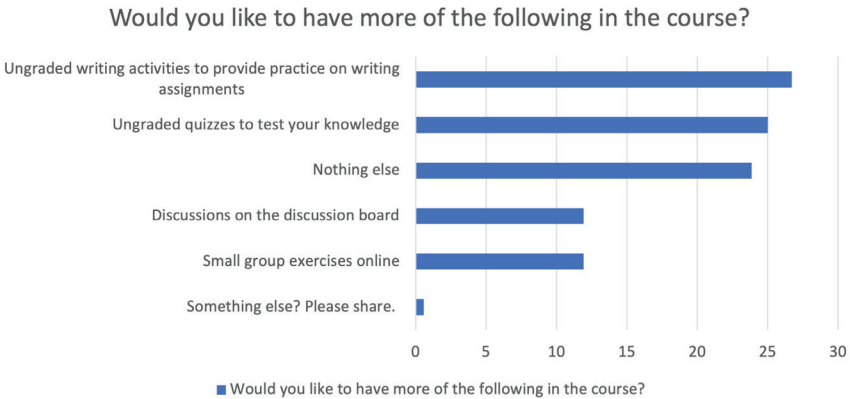


Figure 1: Student Preferences for Ungraded Items

This piece of data is significant for us in terms of course design as we revise going forward.

Open-Ended Student Feedback on OER Course Templates

The survey provided opportunities for open-ended feedback, to which students responded with rich answers, all of which related to how well-designed the OER course was (or was not). Trends in open-ended response to feedback for course materials trended positive, with the most common words used being (1) easy-to-access, (2) good explanations, (3) effective

connections, (4) personalized to each student, and (5) effective mapping/organization. The positive themes reported by students are indicative of what our team's SMEs described as foundations and bellwethers of effective OER course design. Negative feedback tended to include words like (1) device/browser compatibility, (2) better text to speech options, (3) D2L navigation, (4) difficulty accessing Achieve for first-time, and (5) major assignment sequencing. This last item was surprising, but several students mentioned that they would rather have the major assignment re-ordered. Unfortunately, they gave no indication of which assignments. This unanswered data piece gives us an opportunity to re-work the question to see if we can find the answer in the next course iteration. Both positive and negative student responses were framed through the lens of their learning experiences with OER materials and a course designed mindfully using OER resources.

Overall, students appreciated the diagnostics and personalized learning provided by the low-cost Achieve learning platform. This type of learning experience usually accompanies textbooks that range to more than \$90.00, and students articulated their knowledge of receiving personalized learning opportunities within a low-cost model. The complete student data set helped our team reflect on what we did well and plan revisions for areas that needed improvement for an enhanced student learning experience, while maintaining a no- or low-cost model.

Possible implications for student learning gleaned from overall positive student responses to low-cost materials and OER course design include the following:

- **Cost savings:** One of the primary benefits of free or low-cost materials is that they make education more accessible and affordable for students. Positive feedback from students on the redesigned course may indicate that they appreciate the cost savings that come with using low-cost materials.
- **Increased engagement:** OER and low-cost materials are often designed to be interactive and engaging, allowing students to participate actively in their own learning. Positive feedback from students on the low-cost materials may suggest that they feel more engaged with the course material and that this engagement is leading to a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

- **Flexibility:** OER and low-cost materials are often available online and can be accessed from anywhere with an internet connection. Positive feedback from students on the low-cost materials may suggest that they appreciate the flexibility that comes with being able to access course materials on their own schedule and from any location.

Overall, positive feedback from students on low-cost materials and OER can indicate that these materials are making education more accessible, engaging, and effective, and that students are benefiting from the use of these resources.

Rationale and Faculty Experiences

Key takeaways from the instructor survey and feedback include technical and administrative support for instructors teaching the course. For example, all instructors found the technical and administrative training at the beginning of the semester to be helpful. One missing piece for future revisions was clear: there was a definite trend in the qualitative survey feedback that let us know that faculty wanted a “Quick Start” Guide and more support during the semester, especially with the Achieve adaptive learning modules. These modules, which were deeply integrated into D2L for students, nevertheless presented challenges for faculty. A few reported a steep learning curve with assigning and sustaining peer review modules. One of the reasons our team went with Achieve for *Everyday Writer* was the diagnostic quizzing that provided each student with a personalized learning plan for the semester. Instructors overwhelmingly appreciated and used this feature. In fact, almost all faculty assigned and used the diagnostics, while only half assigned the study plan.

Although the team surmised that the adaptive learning would be intuitive to navigate, we did not find that to be necessarily so. Instead, intuitiveness had a direct relationship with individual instructors’ more advanced technological knowledge. This was a bit of a disappointment because we know that adaptive learning generates deeper student engagement and can have a positive impact on course pass rates as well as depth and breadth of learning. In future, faculty recommended that we provide more up-front training on Achieve, with complementary training during the semester, before major assignments are due.

Further trends we noted from faculty fell into two strands, quoted below:

1. **Favorite/Most-Used Parts:** diagnostic and study plans that allow each student to progress at their own pace with their individualized content; having the course shell on D2L already set up with modules for students. Faculty also liked that the template provided teaching ideas and tools for the face-to-face sessions.
2. **Least favorite:** technical issues with the platform and how it works for students. Faculty also wanted more self-assessments or other engagement materials in the template course—but not things instructors have to grade. Feedback on ungraded assignments matches with students' feedback for more of these types of low-stakes assignments as well.

Overall, both student and instructor feedback, while overwhelmingly positive, also gave the team some areas for improvement for increasing course quality in terms of content engagement, faculty pedagogical needs, and participation in personalized learning goals.

Lessons Learned

Based on the feedback we received from instructors and students who used the template, we believe that we built an effective facilitator guide, with 100% of instructors, not including the two Co-PIs (n=5), agreeing that the guide was helpful. Given that 80% of instructors only rated the guide as somewhat helpful, along with comments indicating it was a bit too general, we learned that instructors really wanted a ready-to-go course that had specific instructions for weekly modules in the facilitator guide. We also learned that instructors were overall happy with the course content in both amount and quality. Based on student feedback (n=119, 18% response rate), we learned that 80% of students found the course easy to navigate. About half of students found the low-cost textbook hard to navigate. All students liked the study plan from the low-cost textbook, but only 30% thought that the grammar diagnostics helped them improve their writing. As a result of student feedback, we decided to keep the low-cost, adaptive learning text in our Composition 1, 50% hybrid revision, but drop it from the 33% hybrid course and our upcoming Composition 2, OER build.

Four Key Project Outcomes

As stated earlier, we built this course with an Affordable Learning Georgia (ALG) course transformation grant. We have received notice that we are also funded to revise the course as part of an ALG continuous improvement grant. As part of this commitment, we have key project outcomes associated with the course design and revision.

Because Composition 1 is a gateway course with DFWI rates that can sometimes be above 30% in hybrid modalities, it is an important contributor to retention, progression, and graduation. Fall 2022 data shows that the Department of English offered 87 sections of 50% hybrid Composition 1, which represents 39% of 222 total Composition 1 sections offered in Fall 2022 semester. Of this enrollment, we created a low-cost template course that was used by instructors in 26 sections of Composition 1, resulting in approximately 676 students using the template. This number is 6 sections less than our grant proposal as a result of last-minute part-time staffing shifts. Approximately 12% of our 5,432 Composition 1 students used the template.

Outcome 1: A key challenge with offering this many hybrid courses that also must be compliant with accessibility laws is that part-time faculty hired at the last minute may have no training in creating successful courses and no access to the D2L learning management system until a week into the semester. The Low-Cost Composition 1 Hybrid Design project alleviated that pain point.

Outcome 2: Our project also answered a university mandate with innovative learning science techniques. In summer of 2021, KSU's Curriculum and Academic Innovation in Academic Affairs mandated a review process by which all online and hybrid courses would meet federal standards for accessibility and engagement. In the Radow College of Humanities and Social Sciences, 1000-level courses were mandated to meet standards before Fall 2022. In this situation, hiring part timers at the last minute with no template (formerly known as master) course available was no longer possible. The Low-Cost Composition 1 Hybrid Design Project team designed a high-quality hybrid Composition 1 template course with low-cost materials, copious student success features, and data-gathering capability. The course met federal guidelines for accessibility and

engagement. The course was designed to be “shovel ready” for new hires with features to make it easy to teach successfully:

- a facilitator guide with lecture and reminder guides for face-to-face days, and
- an online module with engaging and interactive online activities that minimize time consuming discussion board grading but provide opportunities for students to interact with the content, especially threshold concepts, with relevant and instant feedback.

Outcome 3: This course was made available in D2L but was also made available outside D2L to share globally. We created materials using SoftChalk and Articulate so that they are functional inside or outside of D2L. They will be hosted on ALG’s instance of Manifold, OpenALG, as well. The team presented the course at the Open EDUCA Berlin (OEB) conference; based on that experience, the course is also available now using OpenStax’s *Writing Guide with Handbook* (<https://openstax.org/details/books/writing-guide>).

Outcome 4: DFWI Rates: As mentioned before, Composition 1 is a gateway course, and pass rates are important in terms of retention, progression, and graduation. In the pilot, 26 sections of hybrid Composition 1 used the template. At the end of the semester, in the template courses, there was an overall 18.4% DFWI rate. In this study, 526 students in the courses using the template achieved passing grades, for a cumulative 82.7% pass rate.

Sustainability and the Path Forward

The Department of English plans to offer this course to late-hire colleagues each semester. All course content created in this project aligns to the program guidelines and learning outcomes for First-Year Composition at KSU. The course will be reviewed and updated every year per these guidelines. Our goal was to build a template course that is easy to maintain and only requires minor updates each semester to accommodate broken links and software updates. For this reason, topics and readings were chosen not only to accommodate a wide audience but also to be suitable for a long period of time.

In order to remain in compliance with requirements with regard to hybrid course quality, the department will maintain a template Composition

1 to support the hiring of part timers. For this reason, this project will be used and kept current for the foreseeable future. More course sections will be added as the need for additional sections grows. Also, it is important to note that this template is not limited to use by part timers. Full time faculty who may be assigned hybrid Composition 1 courses have used this template, as well. In fact, an additional student success feature of this project became clear early in the pilot when a new hire was not able to teach just a week after the semester started. Because the template was being used, two senior professors were able to step into the open courses and continue the course without the students experiencing much disruption at all.

Conclusions and Future Work

Our data and pilot suggest a robust beginning to our open educational resources (OER) pedagogical approach. Indeed, as we move forward, our team has considered the integration of resources that expand our reach to multiple student audiences and contexts, including units and modules that feature diverse resources on human rights, experiences of underrepresented groups, and localized civil rights histories. Members of the team have also been included on other ALG grants, including a transformation grant awarded to the Georgia Gwinnett College, whose team is building a Composition 1 template focused on Latinx readings and assignments.

Going forward, KSU faculty, instructional designers, and student researchers will continue to revise and reimagine OER resources in ways that innovate pedagogical strategies and increase student success.

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Author Bios

Jeanne Law, Kennesaw State University

Jeanne Law is a Professor of English and the Director of Composition at Kennesaw State University. She is an early adopter and researcher on ethical uses of generative artificial intelligence in college writing courses, and she is passionate about cultivating innovative approaches to open educational resources, especially in general education programs. She is also a historiographic researcher who seeks to create connections between pivotal human rights moments of the past and present cultural moments through a feminist rhetorical lens.

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Dr. Tamara Powell earned her PhD from Bowling Green State University in Ohio and is an English professor at Kennesaw State University. Her research includes open educational resources and teaching strategies to support success in underserved populations.

Appendix: FYC Program Pathways: Alignment and Consistency for 1101 and 1102

Overview

The following major assignments for ENGL 1101 and 1102 will help generate consistent language and engender alignment across the FYC program at KSU. In creating these assignment structures, FYC faculty working groups have considered multiple stakeholders, including students, colleagues, and administration (in this case USG) – in that order. Moreover, the working groups created these assignment sequences in consultation with FYC faculty at KSU and after careful consideration of faculty syllabi and best practices comparator and aspirational institutions. Adopting these frameworks in our classrooms will ensure that students have consistent and transferrable learning experiences in FYC, that our colleagues have creative license to innovate in their classes, and that administration has necessary metrics against which we can map student learning.

For our work, we delineate differences between **types** of assignment and actual assignments themselves. The **type** of assignment should be overarching and not include specific instructions or rubrics. For example, an “analysis” (see 1101 section below) is a “type” or “genre” of writing. An instructor’s assignment that aligns to that type might be framed as a multimodal text, may be an essay that asks a student to consider how an author approaches purpose/audience/style/context, or it may even be a deep dive into a social issue that has been written about across publication contexts. Whatever the assignment looks like in form and function, as long as it meets the criteria to be considered an analysis, then it is aligned appropriately.

As we develop a programmatic future that aligns with trends in the field of FYC, comparator and aspirational institutions, and USG expectations, it’s important to remember that this is a “living document.” Program growth requires that we retain flexibility to revise this document as trends in the field change, as we situate ourselves uniquely within the USG, and as we consider KSU as a model for embracing best practice trends in the field. **For now, these assignment types continue to be in-place for AY 2022-2023.**

Guiding Principles for Use of These Assignments in the Classroom

1. We will have a genre/type-based assignment sequence in FYC going forward so that our students, faculty, and other stakeholders can expect consistency of learning as well as local, sustainable, and measurable data that shows student success.
2. We will have a syllabus style/template that gives faculty the freedom to determine percentages for major assignments, the actual assignments they can align to the required types for each gateway course, their texts of choice selected from the current FYC approved list, and scaffolding/pacing of their course.
3. These are major assignment types only; three (3) major assignments per course¹.
4. Low-stakes and scaffolded work, as well as day-to-day lesson plans are left up to individual instructors.
5. Assignments aligned with these types need not be traditional papers (though they very well may be). While writing will be an important component of any major assignment, the final product may take the form of alternative media or be multimodal in accordance with the instructor's course structure and pedagogy.

Brief Overview of Course Assignments

Every section of our FYC courses will align with the relevant major assignment sequences below. More details on each are provided in the following section. Sample assignments and syllabi from colleagues, TILTed resources, and examples of rubrics are located in the FYC D2L portal. **Please note: Effective Summer 2022, the first two assignment types for ENGL 1102 can be assigned in the order below or reverse order, depending on an instructor's pedagogical strategies.**

ENGL 1101

1. Narrative/Reflective Assignment
2. Analysis Assignment
3. Argument Assignment

1 This is a minimum number of assignments. Faculty may choose to offer more on their own.

ENGL 1102

1. Research Review/Annotated Bibliography
2. “First Look” Research-based Assignment
3. Research Project

Detailed Overview of Course Structures, Learning Outcomes, and Assignment Descriptions

ENGL 1101

English 1101 Course Description

English 1101 focuses on skills required for effective writing in a variety of contexts, with emphasis on exposition, analysis, and argumentation. Also includes introductory use of a variety of research skills.

English 1101 Course Outcomes

Upon completion of English 1101, students will be able to . . .

1. Practice writing in situations where print and/or electronic texts are used, examining why and how people choose to write using different technologies.
2. Interpret the explicit and implicit arguments of multiple styles of writing from diverse perspectives.
3. Practice the social aspects of the writing process by critiquing your own work and the work of your colleagues.
4. Analyze how style, audience, social context, and purpose shape your writing in electronic and print spaces.
5. Craft diverse types of texts to extend your thinking and writerly voice across styles, audiences, and purposes.

Major Aligned Assignments

1. **Narrative/Reflective Assignment:** a narrative assignment asks students to write through a *story* or a *history* (or both). This could take the form of a reflection. Chronology is a synonym here as well. Sample assignments include but are not limited to:
 - a. Personal narrative
 - b. Collage/multi-genre narrative

- c. Literacy narrative/digital literacy narrative
 - d. “This I Believe” assignment
 - e. Transition narrative (into college or another important transition)
 - f. Family history
 - g. History of a profession or work narrative
 - h. Reflective portfolio cover letter
2. **Analysis Assignment:** an analysis assignment asks students to break some object of study into its component parts and examine those parts carefully to come to a better understanding of the whole. Sample assignments include but are not limited to:
- a. Rhetorical analysis
 - b. Genre analysis/comparative genre analysis
 - c. Audience analysis/kairotic analysis/rhetorical situation analysis
 - d. Stakeholder analysis
 - e. Text in context analysis
 - f. Pattern + interpretation
 - g. Conceptual lens/interpretive lens analysis
3. **Argument Assignment:** an argument assignment includes persuasion as an explicit goal. Persuasion can be broadly conceived; this assignment need not involve taking a stand on a controversial issue (though it may). Sample assignments include but are not limited to:
- a. Persuasive assignment
 - b. A specific argument method: Rogerian, Toulmin, etc
 - c. Causal argument
 - d. Definition argument
 - e. Op-ed (or another “public” argumentative genre)
 - f. Joining the conversation or they say/I say essay

ENGL 1102

English 1102 Course Description

English 1102 focuses on developing writing skills beyond the levels of proficiency required by ENGL 1101. Emphasizes interpretation and evaluation and advanced research methods.

English 1102 Course Outcomes

Upon completion of English 1102, students will be able to . . .

1. Locate print and digital sources that represent multiple perspectives.
2. Analyze sources by critically reading, annotating, engaging, comparing, and drawing implications.
3. Practice working through the writing process, including brainstorming, drafting, peer review, revision, and publication.
4. Compose a rhetorically-situated, researched text that enters an ongoing conversation, integrating relevant sources.

Major Aligned Assignments²

1. **Research Review:** in this assignment type, students present key insights gathered from the research they have been conducting as they work towards developing their research project's thesis. In producing a research review, students use databases and other university (and other) resources to find research materials; assess the quality of that research in relation to a larger, ongoing research project; and demonstrate appropriate academic documentation style. Sample assignments include but are not limited to:
 - a. Literature Review
 - b. Annotated Bibliography
 - c. Journal of notes/ note cards (submitted for review)
2. **"First Look" Research-based Assignment:** students present their projects' topic, preliminary research, tentative thesis and/ or potential argumentative points at an intermediate stage of the research-project process for feedback from peers and/ or the instructor. Sample assignments include but are not limited to:
 - a. Outline
 - b. Précis
 - c. Proposal
 - d. Rough Draft (submitted for a grade)
3. **Research Project:** the research project represents the culmination of the recursive practices of the course. Students will present a

² Please note: ENGL 1102 is not a literature-based course. We do not teach literary research in this course. Also note: effective Summer 2022, assignments 1 and 2 may be taught in reverse order.

polished product of their work that illustrates the development of the project from the aforementioned stages. Consequently, the project should include a properly-documented, carefully-developed argument that makes use of research. Sample assignments include but are not limited to:

- a. Research Paper
- b. Researched Essay
- c. Multimedia Project
- d. “Ted Talk”