An Introduction to Acceleration: Some History, Some Questions, Our Stories

Leah Anderst, Jennifer Maloy, and Jed Shahar, Issue Editors, *BWe*

Issue #14.1

This issue of the *Basic Writing e-Journal* is dedicated to the topic of acceleration, the increasingly common practice of having students take credit-bearing composition courses earlier at college than they would under what are considered more traditional developmental models. The increasing popularity of acceleration in higher education has likely emerged, in part, because it represents a common ground between faculty and institutional decision makers, both of whom see it as a way to increase student access to and success in higher education. That these common interests represent positive motives for change in how writing instruction is thought about, practiced, and organized suggests, to us, that careful study of the topic may offer insights into how meaningful educational reform could be enacted. This, of course, does not suggest that we intend this collection of research to be viewed as advocacy for (or against) acceleration as a practice. Instead we hope this issue is a resource exploring the benefits, limitations, challenges, and practices of acceleration both for those interested in it specifically and those interested in educational and institutional reform in general.

Historically, the *Basic Writing e-Journal* has been a regular forum to discuss acceleration in its many forms. The second issue of the journal (Issue #1.2) in fact includes three pieces considering acceleration. William Lalicker's "A Basic Introduction to Basic Writing Program Structures: A Baseline and Five Alternatives" serves as an excellent primer on the differences between acceleration models, covering the stretch model, studio model, and intensive model. Supports in these models range from extra time across semesters (stretch), extra time within semesters (studio, intensive), and self-directed student support. This final option is labeled as

mainstreaming by Lalicker and a similar usage is seen in Fitzgerald's "Basic Writing in One California Community College," which describes Chabot College's studio basic writing option. However, a broader sense of *mainstream* or "providing various kinds of extra support for them [developmental students] within the course ['regular' composition course]," one similar to the present usage of acceleration, is used by Licklider in her book review of Marilyn Sternglass's *Time to Know Them.*

Questions of how acceleration is best implemented at colleges have also been a focus of the journal over the years. Mary Segall considers questions related to text selection, program design, and instructor choice in her *BWe* essay, "The Triple Helix: Program, Faculty, and Text" (Issue #2.1). These issues are viewed through the lens of a studio acceleration model (referred to by Segall as intensive and jumbo). The potential value and use of technology in a stretch model is considered by Thomas Peele as part of his larger student-centered examination of an acceleration program, "Speaking for Themselves: Basic Writing Students in a Stretch Program" (in Issue #12.1). Service learning within an acceleration model is similarly considered as a piece of a larger whole in Cori Brewster's "Basic Writing Through the Back Door: Community-Engaged Course in the Rush-to-Credit Age" (in Issue #13.1). Brewster's back-and-forth describes a pre-college model of acceleration and details her ambivalence toward acceleration and compression in theory and practice. Brewster's reservations are tempered by clear support for the service-learning element in her acceleration experience, arguing that it has "tremendous value."

Ambivalent feelings regarding acceleration practice and implementation have been explored through the journal's history as well. Expressing concerns about the support

mainstreamed students have receive while also celebrating how these students weren't marginalized by a basic writer designation, Laura Gray-Rosendale (with Raymona Leonard) examines her written exchanges with a student in "Demythologizing the 'Basic Writer': Identity, Power, and Other Challenges to the Discipline" (Issue #3.1). Kathleen Dixon, in her review of the collection of essays *Mainstreaming Basic Writers*, presents many of the arguments for and concerns with mainstreaming, the unifying element of acceleration models (Issue #4.1).

Obviously, the arguments, concerns, and practices associated with acceleration continue, even as the concept and practice of acceleration has grown rapidly in the past decade. Acceleration has taken a prominent position in basic writing pedagogy in recent years thanks, in large part, to the efforts of Peter Dow Adams and his colleagues at the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC), where the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) was created in 2008. Since then, and based on the student successes seen at CCBC, this model has been adopted by more than 200 schools across the country. It has been studied by researchers at The Community College Research Center at Columbia University's Teachers' College and by members of the California Acceleration Project, often demonstrating positive effects on student retention and academic success. Likewise, at the annual Conference on Acceleration in Developmental Education (CADE), instructors experienced with ALP have shared their practices and findings. This special issue of the *Basic Writing e-Journal* builds upon such existing research and practices by offering readers a focused and detailed examination of both the whys and hows of acceleration written by those planning, implementing, teaching, and reviewing acceleration across the country.

As recent adopters of the ALP model at our own campus, Queensborough Community College, CUNY, we were inspired and motivated by the acceleration movement as we sought reform of our basic writing program. Our own ALP journey began in the summer of 2013, when the three of us travelled to Baltimore to attend Conference on Acceleration in Developmental Education (CADE). Each of us, along with some of our colleagues, attended a variety of presentations on ALP in a variety of forms at a variety of institutions, learning about versions that merged developmental reading and writing, that involved one or two instructors, and that did or did not include supplemental tutoring components. We heard Adams speak about the rapid growth of ALP in two-year and four-year colleges across the country and about the efforts taking place to study the effectiveness of ALP. We also learned helpful tips on how to speak to various parties at our college who had varying degrees of investment in creating ALP: administrators, chairs, advisers, registrar staff, and faculty members.

When we returned from the conference, the real work of envisioning ALP for our college and our student body began. We had unique advantages at our college: our administration and departmental chairs were very supportive of creating ALP; we had a group of faculty members who were eager to design and implement such a program; and we had contacts with program directors from within our university system who had proven, positive results from their ALPs that they were willing to share with us. We also faced unique challenges at our institution: there was a (sometimes tense) division between our English Department, which housed our first-year writing courses, and our Academic Literacy Department, responsible for all developmental reading and writing as well as ESL courses; our university system mandated that students pass a high-stakes standardized writing exam to exit remediation; and we faced some resistance from

faculty members who saw ALP as a move to reduce and eventually eliminate the developmental supports that many of our students need.

We realized that to design an ALP that would work for our faculty, and most importantly, our students, we had to work across departments and create a curriculum that could simultaneously support students in first-year writing while ensuring that they also were prepared to pass the CUNY Assessment Test in Writing (CATW) by the end of the semester, so they could officially exit remediation. In Fall 2013, those faculty members from both English and Academic Literacy who attended the conference met to talk about piloting two sections of a Writing ALP in Spring 2014. Leah Anderst became the point person from the English Department and Jennifer Maloy the representative from Academic Literacy. The two of us worked together to design the curriculum for ALP and then teach this curriculum in the subsequent semester.

Before designing the curriculum—the actual process of which was an invigorating and fruitful collaboration that we both enjoyed a great deal—we faced many structural hurdles. We had to make a strong argument to convince all involved that Leah and Jennifer could each teach both the developmental writing and first-year writing components of the ALP, rather than Leah being responsible solely for the first-year writing course because she was English faculty and Jennifer being responsible solely for the developmental course because she was from Academic Literacy. We also had to make a strong argument that no hours should be cut in the design of ALP—that we could link a 4-hour developmental writing course and a 4-hour first-year writing course (with additional "mainstream" students). Lastly, we had to make a strong argument that students in native-English speaking developmental writing courses *and* ESL students eligible for

an upper-level writing course could register for ALP. We supported these arguments with information we obtained at CADE, sharing program models and demographic information from a variety of schools we learned about at presentations. It was important for us to make all of these arguments in order for both of our departments and our administration to be on board, particularly when designing an unsuccessful or flawed ALP could mean a drop in our CATW pass rates that would put our students in precarious positions at the college. Thankfully, we were able to make our case, in large part because we were able to draw upon a growing ALP network made available through CADE.

As our program has grown from two sections in Spring 2014 to nine sections of Writing ALP and four sections of Reading ALP in Spring 2017, the large group of faculty and staff who support ALP have seen each semester the success of the model as the pass rates on our standardized exam, the CATW, are consistently high for our ALP students, and about 90% or our ALP students receive passing grades in the first-year composition course. We also add new faculty members each semester, which has yielded highly productive collaborations and discussions across departments. At meetings, English faculty teaching ALP would say things like "There doesn't seem to be much difference between the ALP students and the mainstream students in my English 101 class," and "How in the world do you handle this test? It is so stressful!" Likewise, Academic Literacy faculty teaching ALP would say things like "There doesn't seem to be much difference between the ALP students and the mainstream students in my English 101 class," and "Some of the English language learners in ALP are doing so well in my English 101 class when they have time to revise and work on longer essays." ALP has provided more opportunities for English, ESL, and developmental writing faculty to talk with and learn from one another, promoting collegiality and collaboration. In fact, in our particular

case, it made the ultimate merging of our two departments, which took place at the beginning of the Fall 2016 semester, much smoother because many faculty members had gotten to know one another through teaching ALP, and, more importantly, had gathered proof through ALP that the work that ESL, developmental writing, and first-year writing faculty do is much more similar than it is different.

We mention all of these details not to overwhelm readers in the minutia of programmatic procedures but to demonstrate the many moving parts of implementing ALP beyond the truly enjoyable parts that are teaching ALP, watching students evolve as writers, conceiving of carefully scaffolded and engaging writing assignments, and reading all of the compelling and thoughtful writing that students produce over the course of the semester. As our program grows, we often realize that the aspects of ALP that require the most work are not the ones we would have expected. For example, designing writing assignments that bridge the work done in English 101 and the requirements of the CATW is pleasant and straightforward when compared to monitoring test scores and grades for all students currently in ALP (at present over 200 per semester). Moreover, arguing the successes of students enrolled in our program has proven much easier than juggling the need to maintain quality and consistency as policies for developmental education change across our university system. We have realized this most immediately over the past year, as our university system is in the midst of an overhaul of developmental education, an overhaul that certainly will require us to reach out again to the ALP network as our university moves away from high-stakes testing.

The struggles and negotiations in the design of ALP have not often been included in published scholarship on ALP to this point. What scholarship exists often focuses on describing

ALP and arguing its successfulness in increasing retention (Adams et al.) and its cost effectiveness (Jenkins et al.). This scholarship is, of course, very important in proving the legitimacy of new programs as their desire for adoption grows. At a time when the ALP model has gained so much momentum across the United States, though, those of us who have successfully implemented ALP are at point where we can begin to expand the limits of ALP research.

The articles in this special issue are intended to begin such expansion of research, exploring multiple methods of assessing programs, researching the effects of ALP programs on students' identities as college writers, and considering alternate acceleration models to support student success. We have divided the issue into three sections with a short piece by Peter Dow Adams, "ALP FAQ" leading the issue. Organized as a list of common questions and concerns about ALP models, Adams' piece provides background into ALP, numbers related to the success ALP has had on his campus and elsewhere, and data demonstrating that the ALP model, which relies on low course caps, does not cost colleges more than traditional developmental courses.

SECTION 1: CREATING AND ASSESSING AN ALP

The goal of the first section of essays is to share with instructors, writing program administrators (WPAs), and schools some of the experiences associated with developing, piloting, and assessing accelerated programs at individual campuses. Leading this section is a co-authored essay by Lori Chastaine Michas, Meagan Newberry, Karen S. Uehling, and Abigail L. Wolford: "A University-Community College Collaborative Project to Create Co-Requisite Offerings and Reduce Remediation." Here, Michas et al. describe the collaboration between two schools: Boise State University and The College of Western Idaho. Faced with state-wide goals

to move students more quickly through developmental writing and into college completion, program administrators developed a co-requisite, acceleration model for basic writing taught throughout the public colleges in Idaho. The authors describe the "Writing Plus Project," a forum for cross-institutional research and collaboration; the nuts and bolts of the acceleration model as it was initially implemented across the two colleges; and the benefits and challenges that the adoption of ALP has presented. This ALP program was awarded the 2015 Council on Basic Writing's Innovation Award for highly successful basic writing programs.

Jason Evans, of Prairie State College, contributes an essay entitled "To Live with It: Assessing an Accelerated Basic Writing Pilot Program from the Perspective of Teachers." Evans details his school's thorough assessment of four basic writing models over a period of two years. Included among these models are two varieties of ALP. The authors report on the successes of the various models in terms of instructor experience, pass rates and persistence, student focus-group feedback, and class observations. Evans concludes that the three-hour accelerated model, linked explicitly to a credit-bearing composition course, offers the best chances for guiding students through college level writing.

SECTION 2: STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES AND POSITIONS

The psychological impact that an ALP model has on students is often cited as one of the key factors in the model's success. This second group of essays considers the ways that acceleration positions students differently than a traditional developmental model might. Rebecca Williams Mlynarczyk's "Acceleration vs. Remediation: What's in a Name for Composition Students?" leads the section. Her piece examines how labels and the act of naming are perceived by the many stakeholders surrounding basic writing education at the college level.

She reviews a lively discussion thread that took place among instructors on the Council of Basic Writing email listserv (CBW-L) in 2015, and she shares perspectives from students labeled remedial by their institutions. Mlynarczyk finally describes ALP as a powerful way to reframe basic writing instruction: "Instead of assuming that students must be 'remediated' before they can handle college-level writing, ALP begins with the much more positive assumption that, with appropriate support and individual attention, students will be able to succeed" (12).

Jamey Gallagher's "Genre and Writerly Identity in the ALP Classroom" is a strong follow-up to the ideas on ALP presented by Mlynarczyk. Here Gallagher, the assistant director of the ALP at The Community College of Baltimore County, describes surveying his students early in a semester to understand their attitudes about writing and about themselves as writers. The results led him to design a genre-studies-based approach to the accelerated class. Focusing on the conventions and the audiences of different genres rather than on a "part-to-whole" approach to writing instruction, Gallagher hoped to communicate to students the notion that there are distinct forms of writing each with distinct goals and conventions.

Rounding out the section is Stephanie A. Kratz's "Learning Journals in One ALP: Making Visible Students' Voices About Writing Ability and the Affective Context of Learning." In this essay, Kratz details the initial piloting and scale-up of the ALP model adopted at her institution, Heartland Community College, with a focus on the successes linked to reflective assignments adopted by ALP course instructors. Non-cognitive concerns are often cited as major factors impacting students who are placed into developmental courses, and these reflective assignments, specifically a bi-weekly Learning Journal where the instructor and the student can

engage in a dialogue about the course, encouraged students to become more aware of the "soft-skills" needed for success in college.

SECTION 3: ALTERNATE FORMS OF ALP

While the CCBC-style ALP model is fast becoming the standard for acceleration in basic writing pedagogy, alternative accelerated models, shaped often by local contexts and constraints, thrive at a number of schools. The final essays of this issue focus on three such models. In "Balancing the Real and Ideal: Linking Program Design to Pedagogical Success in Co-Requisite Writing Support," Annie S. Mendenhall and Margaret Brockland-Nease describe the creation and implementation of an accelerated model that combines some of the goals and best practices of accelerated learning with those of studio models. Their essay outlines the pros and cons of these two models. They highlight some of the problems encountered while running the classes, and they offer recommendations for others developing a studio-inflected ALP model.

Brenda Refaei and Ruth Benander's "Using an Emporium Model in an Introduction to Academic Literacies Course" describes an alternative ALP model geared toward what we might typically call "lower level basic writers," where much of the responsibility of placement and course work falls on the shoulders of students. Because of internal constraints, Refaei and Benander's college, The University of Cincinnati, Blue Ash College, was unable to adopt a more "traditional" co-requisite ALP model. In the model they describe, students who place into the lowest level can choose to take one "emporium" developmental course rather than the two-semester sequence of developmental writing that precedes 101 for many students at the college. The emporium model involves online writing and reading modules as well as "just in time" assistance from instructors who facilitate their students' projects. The model is uniquely

positioned to give students that control. Findings from weekly student surveys indicate that student participants appreciated the control they had over their own reading and writing.

In the third essay of this section, Stephanie Natale-Boianelli and her co-authors from Atlantic Cape College describe a "triad model" of acceleration in their essay, "Accelerating Developmental English at Atlantic Cape: The Triad Model." While the ALP model has been successful for many colleges across the country, some faculty and WPAs face the challenge of defending what appears to be the added cost of a model that relies on co-requisite courses with very low numbers of students. The triad model at Atlantic Cape addresses this concern by drawing students from two college composition courses into one developmental "support" course. As the authors explain, "our triad model is attractive to administrators because it *is* sustainable—it does not demand more resources than the traditional developmental course" (1). The authors describe many challenges they faced developing and running the triad model: scheduling concerns, staffing problems, and pedagogical issues. They also provide a detailed glimpse into the ALP classroom and semester as well as suggested best practices for instructors of ALP courses.

We are very excited to present the diverse perspectives and approaches to accelerated learning in this issue and hope that it will support writing program administrators and instructors who currently are, or plan to be, involved in accelerated learning initiatives. As we, and many of the contributors to this issue, have learned through designing and implementing ALP, our writing programs work best when they are informed by well-designed and researched models that engage faculty and support students. We believe that this issue shares some essential best practices both for implementation and assessment in such programs.

Acknowledgements

We offer our great appreciation to Barbara Gleason for all her help, support, and encouragement throughout the entire process of producing this special issue and to Lynn Reid for her important production work and to Nargiza Matyakubova and Melissa Valerie for their careful editing. We also thank all of the writers for their contributions to this issue as well as all of the manuscript reviewers and the editorial team at *BWe Journal* for making this special issue possible.

Manuscript Reviewers: Each manuscript we received was reviewed by two readers. We acknowledge the time and dedication of the following manuscript reviewers for this issue: Elizabeth Baldridge, Robert Blaisdell, Elizabeth Clarke, Cheryl Comeau-Kirschner, Jacqueline Emery, Peter Gray, June Griffin, John Guelcher, Heidi Johnsen, Marisa Klages-Bombich, Tahneer Oksman, Wendy Olson, Harald Sundt, Stephanie Wade, and Sara Webb-Sunderhaus.

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Leah Anderst is Assistant Professor of English at Queensborough Community College, CUNY, where she co-coordinates the Accelerated Learning Program and teaches writing, literature, and film studies. Her work has appeared in *a/b: Auto/biography Studies*, *Narrative*, *Orbis Litterarum*,

Senses of Cinema, and *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*. She is the editor of the essay collection, *The Films of Eric Rohmer* (Palgrave, 2014).

Jennifer Maloy is an assistant professor and Assistant Director of First-Year Writing in the English Department at Queensborough Community College, CUNY. Her current scholarship focuses on service-learning at two-year colleges, identity construction of multilingual student writers, and accelerated learning programs. Her work has been published in *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* and the *Basic Writing eJournal.*

Jed Shahar is an Assistant Professor in the English Department at Queensborough Community College. He co-coordinates the Accelerated Learning Program.