

A University-Community College Collaborative Project to Create Co-Requisite Offerings and Reduce Remediation

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This essay describes a year-long, grant-funded, cross-institutional collaborative project between Boise State University and the College of Western Idaho, a community college. The goal of the project was to institute an Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) model for first-year and basic writing, in response to a state mandate to embrace Complete College Idaho, a form of Complete College America. The essay depicts the institutional context of each college and analyzes the challenges and benefits of the new model at each institution. The authors consider the differing roles of full-time and contingent faculty at the two institutions and the challenge of defining reasonable grant work requirements, given the varied teaching, research, and service expectations of instructors. The piece also considers the complex reasons Idaho students may not finish higher education and the extent to which the goals of Complete College Idaho could be met by instituting an accelerated model.

Collaborative projects across institutional levels rarely appear in basic writing studies. Although workshops and conferences bring together colleagues from varied institutions (secondary, community college, college, university), seldom can faculties engage in sustained partnerships. A few writers have documented extended high school-college collaborations; Mary Kay Crouch and Gerri McNenny describe their collaboration with high schools in southern California in the 1990s (Crouch and McNenny), and George Otte recounts a New York City high school-college project also in the late 1990s (Otte). More recently, Patricia Schulster documents specific guidelines and agendas for a secondary-postsecondary project (Schulster). Even more rare are sustained cross-institutional projects that span post-secondary levels: community colleges or technical institutes paired with four-year colleges or universities.

This is somewhat surprising given the growing importance of the accelerated learning program (ALP) approach to basic writing nationally. For instance, the state of California has

scholarship [...] that cedes composition teaching to [...] market algorithms and efficiency imperatives” (Scott and Welch 8). Certainly, Complete College Idaho (CCI) reveals the neoliberal tendencies of austerity. Many of CCI’s terms carry a residue of managerial thinking, including “remediation,” “transformation,” “delivery,” “emporium,” “acceleration,” and others. When basic writing is conceived of as simply a means to deliver services, it becomes possible to view this endeavor as little more than a business model to be managed. Students and quality writing, as well as teachers and quality teaching, disappear from the discourse.

With a limited framework for interrogating this management discourse and its implications, we reviewed the CCI options looking for the best, most pedagogically sound approach to writing instruction and selected the co-requisite model. This decision was based on our knowledge of basic writing scholarship surrounding the acceleration project of the Community College of Baltimore, which has won many awards, including the Innovation Award of the Council on Basic Writing (CBW). The co-requisite model was originated by Peter Adams, a past Chair of CBW. Adams and colleagues are well-known for their scholarship on the value of the co-requisite model (Adams et al.).

In April 2016, Adams stated on a WPA-L posting: “It would be better if the many efforts being made to improve the way we organize basic writing were faculty driven rather than top-down mandates. [...] However, the model known as ALP did not originate with Bill and Melinda Gates, nor with Complete College America nor with any state or federal agency. ALP was developed by a group of hard-working English faculty at the Community College of Baltimore County” (Adams, WPA-L posting). Adams then asks, “What is the correct faculty response to a top-down mandate that is actually a good idea?” He answers, “While it is still appropriate to

object to the process, to refuse to adopt a model that will improve the success rates of students because we object to the process seems to me to be a mistake” (Adams, WPA-L posting).

In addition to the thoughtful, qualitative pedagogy of the ALP initiative, based on smaller classes and faculty support, we had another reason to opt for acceleration: we were committed to the change efforts of Writing Program Administrators in Idaho who had worked for many years to improve placement policies and were ultimately successful (Estrem et al.). Rather than a rhetoric of austerity, we embraced, perhaps naively, a rhetoric of hope. We hoped to discover how institutions like the Community College of Baltimore County had attained its large grant so that a comparable grant might be obtained to fund Idaho students. Simply put, we wanted more for our students who often face difficult employment prospects and life circumstances.

To implement the co-requisite approach, Heidi Estrem, Director of First-Year Writing at Boise State University, assisted by Karen Uehling and Meagan Newberry, wrote a grant to the Idaho State Board of Education to support curricular development. This grant resulted in two initiatives: the “Writing Plus Project” and a related “First-Year Writing Across Idaho” institute. The Writing Plus Project was a year-long collaboration between Boise State University (BSU) and the College of Western Idaho (CWI) in 2013-2014 aimed at developing and implementing a co-requisite course for basic writing. “First-Year Writing Across Idaho” institute was a week-long summer conference in which faculty from each Idaho institution met to work on first-year writing and to share their efforts at implementing a co-requisite approach to developmental writing specifically. A side benefit of the SBOE grant was that it gave faculty an opportunity to work together, develop a sense of the importance of their work as professionals, and their voice as classroom instructors. This kind of collaborative change is possible in Idaho, a place with a low population and only eight public institutions of higher education, a state where people who

including 14 students who placed into 101 and 12 and who would have previously placed into either English 15 or English 90. CWI made the gutsy decision to eliminate both remedial courses (English 15 and 90) at once when they moved to the co-requisite model. At CWI, the 12 students enroll concurrently in English 101 for three graded credits and a two-credit graded English 100 course, which carries elective credit. Students meet with the same instructor for two hours a week for English 100, which is scheduled directly after English 101. From this point forward, we will refer to our co-requisite offerings at either school (one-credit Writer's Studio at BSU, two-credit English 100 course at CWI) as "English 101 Plus."

Various kinds of assessment data have been collected since the new course models were introduced, and they demonstrate positive results. At BSU, overall portfolio assessment and assessment of three sample outcomes were conducted in Spring 2013; pass rates for English 102 or planned enrollment in English 102 was the focus in Spring 2014; and assessment of digital platforms for portfolios occurred in Spring 2015. Assessment at BSU is programmatic, an anonymous assessment of representative portfolios to determine if the program as a whole is meeting its agreed upon outcomes. CWI carried out anonymous overall portfolio assessment and assessment of five specific outcomes in Spring 2014 as a joint teacher research project and has continuing assessments in progress. For more information about assessment, [see here on the Writing Plus Project website.](#)

Institutional Context: Boise State University

BSU was, in 2015, a PhD-granting urban university with over 22,000 students, 85 BA programs, 67 master's programs and 10 PhD programs ("Facts and Figures 2015-2016"), and in 2016 was classified as "a doctoral research university by the Carnegie Foundation" (Schimpf). BSU began as Boise Junior College (opened in 1934 as a public institution) to provide

educational opportunities during the depression for local residents. The junior college grew rapidly, particularly in the post-World War II era, and by the 1960s had become the four-year Boise State College, followed quickly by Boise State University in 1974. BSU was designated by the State Board of Education to serve a community college function for many years, and in the 1980s BSU President John Keiser resisted efforts to create a separate community college, preferring to strengthen vocational programs as well as academic programs; the institution then developed into essentially a community university because it was in effect the only college in the area and was especially valuable to place-bound learners (Uehling, “From Community College”). In fact, it was not until 2009 that CWI was created (“Facts at a Glance”).

The community-involved history of BSU laid the groundwork for a continuing relationship between BSU and CWI; because we are in the same geographic area, some of the faculty at CWI are BSU alumni, some teach at both institutions, and some BSU and CWI faculty know each other through non-academic circles. BSU also has a continuing commitment to beginning students and to excellence in basic writing teaching; the basic writing course has always been part of the English Department, and there is a long tradition of mentoring new BW faculty and offering graduate instruction in the teaching of BW. In addition, a thriving stretch program, unfortunately without credit status for basic writing, was developed before the implementation of the co-requisite model.

BSU’s English 101 course design is guided by course outcomes, generated by First-Year Writing faculty, which identify expectations for reading and writing (“Welcome”). Instructors have the freedom to choose textbooks that they feel align with those outcomes. The English 101 Plus studio is based upon responsive teaching, meaning classwork is designed to support the main English 101 coursework. Studio work begins with student questions about current topics in

separate developmental program, especially if there were different credentialing requirements for faculty, implementing an ALP model would have been challenging, and faculty may have struggled to collaborate, since their departments and teaching positions would possibly have been in danger.

The Writing Plus Project

With that background in mind, we turn now to our cross-institutional effort, the Writing Plus Project, a grant-funded collaboration between BSU and CWI. In Spring 2013, the semester before we launched the project, Peter Adams spoke at BSU to faculty from several Idaho institutions, especially BSU and CWI faculty. Adams emphasized that well-designed, ongoing faculty development was crucial to ALP's success. Our project offered sustained professional development at least during the crucial 2013-14 launch year and the following summer. There were almost 30 people involved, including nine BSU participants, 17 CWI participants, plus others (WPAs, consultants). Each institution provided its own co-leader. Participants and co-leaders received modest honorariums from the State Board of Education grant award. The project involved monthly meetings, including two cross-institutional meetings each semester with a specific focus. The goals of the project were to develop curricular materials to support the co-requisite English 101 Plus model, both one- and two-credit co-requisites; to conduct teacher research on student learning and retention with the co-requisite English 101 Plus model; and to share results and provide visibility for Idaho instructors. Such research was essential as we worked to sustain successful models. Instructors benefited from time to share their expertise, collaborate on new approaches, and rethink instruction in a sustained format (instead of through a one-shot workshop). The project also allowed for the development of flexible materials

appropriate for each institution and its students, materials that helped describe the rich content of English 101 Plus.

The 2013-2014 academic year formally began with a joint meeting at BSU in October; in November we met jointly at CWI, and in between the faculty met separately at their own locations. After the initial meeting, CWI faculty visited BSU English 101 Plus classes, and engaged in follow-up conversations with the instructors, and both groups held discussions with their own colleagues. During the fall, CWI faculty developed their English 101 Plus course collaboratively for spring implementation. BSU, which began offering English 101 Plus in spring 2013 (when typically there are fewer developmental students), was, in fall 2013, offering the course for the second time with a full cohort of fall sections. At this time, BSU faculty posted curriculum materials to the Writing Plus Project website to support English 101 Plus and the one-credit model. In addition, both groups worked on defining and framing teacher research projects.

In spring 2014, the roles were reversed. CWI launched its new course, and BSU faculty visited CWI Plus classes, again followed by conversations with both the instructors and each group's own colleagues. CWI faculty added curriculum materials to the Writing Plus Project website to support the two-credit model, and both groups carried out teacher research projects. For BSU faculty, these were Institutional Review Board-approved studies, usually done in pairs, on topics like analysis of assessment data or student perceptions of the course. Originally, CWI had planned similar projects, but this was modified to a day-long assessment project involving all CWI 101 Plus instructors in which faculty reviewed selected English 101 and English 101 Plus portfolios at the end of the term.

In the summer following the project, both groups worked to finalize teacher-research projects and other materials for presentation at the summer 2014 “First-Year Writing Across Idaho” institute, the companion piece of the State Board of Education grant. Additional materials were added to the Writing Plus Project site: curriculum materials to support both one- and two-credit models, summaries of research, and meeting agendas and related documents. BSU faculty analyzed their research findings on student learning and created posters; CWI faculty carried out their day-long outcomes assessment and analyzed the results. Some CWI faculty also prepared materials for discussion groups on teaching that they would lead at the institute, and the CWI Department Chair created an extensive PowerPoint on the assessment data. All of these materials were then presented to colleagues across the state during a focused, full afternoon session at the summer institute, and materials continued to be presented in other venues.

In short, the English 101 Plus Project was a creative, collaborative process. One outcome is the open access website of the project: [Digication E-Portfolio: ENGL 101P Program: BSU and CWI](#), which offers an overview, research, and teaching materials. The opening page presents the purpose of the project, including initial documents and the “year in review” with agendas and follow-up information. The site may be especially useful to those considering similar projects or contemplating curriculum for co-requisite models in varied settings. Links on the opening page lead to local research projects, syllabi, and selected course materials. The “Teacher Research Project” tab contains descriptions of each project and final research posters or presentation slides are attached to each description.

The [First-Year Writing Across Idaho](#) (Google) website is also accessible; this was the companion week-long 2014 institute (and the site also includes a related 2016 institute). Another accessible statewide (Weebly) site, [Idaho 101 Plus](#), deals directly with co-requisite course

offerings; it contains course materials and resources and was created at the summer 2014 institute by faculty representatives from each state institution. Both the Idaho 101 Plus and the Writing Plus Project sites are linked from First-Year Writing Across Idaho.

Contingent Faculty Definitions

At BSU, two levels of contingent faculty exist, part-time instructors who can teach up to nine credits and are paid per course without benefits; and full-time lecturers who teach twelve credits, perform departmental service, and are on annual contracts that include salary and benefits. At CWI, officially only one level of contingent faculty exists, part-time contingent instructors who can teach up to eleven credits per semester but are not eligible for benefits. Full-time faculty sign yearly contracts and have the opportunity to move up through the ranks from instructor to full professor; however, their contracts, which include a salary and benefits, are always done on a yearly basis. Full-time CWI faculty teach fifteen credits per semester, and while they also do service for the department, the bulk of their time is expected to be teaching.

Implementing the Writing Plus Project at Boise State University

As the Writing Plus project commenced in the fall of 2013, Boise State instructors were eager to collaborate with CWI faculty. Though our institutions are distinctively separate, we often share student populations and many adjunct instructors teach cross-institutionally, making the project relevant and valuable. By adding more minds and experience to the discussion, we widened our consideration of what the English 101 Plus course could do. One notable addition was the sense that English 101 Plus was a place not just to help developmental writers, but to educate at-risk students on how to be successful college students. We identified student persistence as a goal worth consideration, and subsequently constructed “student success”

assignments specific to each institution that could be utilized in English 101 Plus to help students hone study skills, schedule their time, and identify (and visit) campus resources.

The Writing Plus Project also had its challenges. We struggled to find meeting times that would accommodate the most people across varied teaching schedules and locations and had to figure commuting, meetings, and observations into already busy schedules. However, professionally, participation in the Writing Plus Project allowed part-time and full-time faculty to work together on an important and public project as well as produce publishable research which was shared at the 2014 “First-Year Writing Across Idaho” summer institute. This not only added useful vitae lines, but it also generated a sense of camaraderie among participants as exhibited by cross-institutional faculty development discussions that continued after the project officially ended.

Implementing the Writing Plus Project at the College of Western Idaho

The first formal mention of the Writing Plus Project at CWI came at a portfolio review session. Contingent faculty were told that developmental writing classes were being reconfigured as English 101 Plus and that professional development would start in the fall. Faculty could sign up if interested. Part-time contingent faculty, usually aware that full-time community college job searches mentioned basic writing teaching experience as desirable, signed up. Most also knew that, as English 101 instructors, they would need to be able to teach the new model to continue getting class assignments. Also while, as an institution, CWI was not necessarily looking to fill new full-time positions (there were none available at that time, even though CWI actually has done most of its hiring from existing pools of contingent faculty), contingent faculty did get the unique opportunity for paid professional development in an area that could contribute to obtaining a full-time job at a community college, perhaps even CWI if positions opened up. This

idea obviously appealed to many low-paid contingent faculty members. Yes, they were interested in the students, but that was a given, considering the length of time many had been teaching. Mostly, it was an opportunity to be able to expand their repertoire and make ends meet financially.

One benefit of the initial grant and mentoring was the opportunity to get to know more people in the department. Sometimes contingent faculty, especially those working at more than one institution, never see anyone if they teach at strange hours and are always running straight back to their car to go to their next job. Jessica Schreyer notes that, “When faculty do not have opportunities to interact with others within their discipline, or even to think more broadly about how best to teach within the varied institutions of which they are a part, then these conditions do not support long-term program consistency” (85). In other words, when contingent faculty feel isolated and don’t have the opportunity to learn and hone their skills with others, they are more likely to leave for a different job, which creates turmoil for those staffing classes, and in turn, affects student learning and the quality of the program. Of course, the Writing Plus Project was unique in that it combined people from two institutions to explore the teaching of basic writing. In some cases, this allowed people to get to know instructors from a different institution. It should also be noted, however, that about half of those trained through CWI were also instructors at BSU, and they were not necessarily offered English 101 Plus sections at BSU.

Contingent Benefits at Boise State

The BSU cohort of the Writing Plus Project became an important sounding board as Boise State’s FYW program navigated the rapid change of the English 101 Plus implementation and evolution. In the first two years we dealt with shifts in English 101 Plus grading from a separate one-credit pass/fail studio, to a one-credit graded studio, to a four-credit combined grade

In the summer of 2015, three instructors from the Boise State Writing Plus Project cohort collaboratively developed an English 101 Plus mentoring program to more systematically prepare department faculty to teach the new course. Implemented in fall 2015, the mentoring included a 4-hour initial workshop, studio observations, and monthly meetings, with a culminating English 101 Plus certification. Leaders and participants also received small stipends. Notably, the English 101 Plus Project had allowed for another mode for faculty to generate worthwhile projects that promote program unity, sustainability, and professionalism.

Contingent Benefits at the College of Western Idaho

CWI has been lucky so far that there has been relatively little contingent turnover; however, the demand for English 101 Plus classes has grown exponentially. Three of the original contingent faculty from the Writing Plus Project have been moved into full-time positions, a few have gone on to other opportunities, including new full-time positions at BSU, and for the first few semesters, only a couple new contingent faculty were added to the classes. However, going into the fifth semester of offering the co-requisite model, CWI found itself needing six new contingent faculty members just two weeks before classes started. To handle the inevitable future mentoring needs, the English Department has converted one of the full-time instructors to the position of Composition Coordinator and given her course released time to focus on faculty development and mentoring, something that will strengthen the program and contribute to its sustainability.

One strength of the Writing Plus Program at CWI is that the department very much views all of the Plus students as “our students.” This is particularly apparent in the willingness of the Language and Arts dean and the English department chair to teach the five-credit classes whenever there is a need. No one asks part-time contingent faculty to teach classes that full-time

The benefits to students at both institutions were clear. Students gained credit for their work and could progress more rapidly toward their goals for education. Despite some healthy fear and skepticism about eliminating the lowest developmental writing course at CWI, faculty were overwhelmingly positive and supportive of the changes. Many faculty realized this is teaching that works well—small classes, more time with students, and a sustained focus on supporting student writers. Seeing students thrive in this model was energizing.

In short, “Complete College Idaho” provided the leverage we needed to successfully implement curricular changes that aligned pedagogically with our values and offered clear benefits to students and instructors. Ultimately we were able to utilize the impending changes arguably generated by the “rhetorics of austerity” as an opportunity. The austerity in this case offered a beneficial cut in lengthy non-credit bearing, costly coursework for at-risk students who are often demoralized by self-perceptions of being remedial and subsequently discouraged from continuing college-level study. By adopting the ALP model, we eliminated drop-out points by placing students into English 101 without prerequisites. Prior to adopting ALP, we chanced confirming student fears of being unprepared for college, when, after a placement test or procedure, they are accepted as students, yet cannot be *genuine* college students until they pass a basic writing course or two.

Expectations of a person’s abilities are powerful. We aim to balance accepting students as full college students, and providing support for those who are underprepared. John Hetts, plenary speaker at the Conference on Acceleration in Developmental Education in June 2015, emphasized the importance of not making a student’s first interaction with the institution a roadblock. He argued that placement into developmental courses sends the message that students “don’t belong” and can “imply that most students are not ready for college and are likely to fail.”

These are powerfully negative messages, and Hetts argues that some remedial programs underestimate capacity. We were lucky enough to utilize the mandate to promote curricular change that cut out drop-out points and also generated opportunities for instructors to participate in meaningful, collaborative work. Admittedly we have the benefit of working within a state with a relatively small overall population as well as unique conditions between our institutions that lent well to collaboration.

Will Idaho meet the 2020 Complete College Idaho goal that the State Board and governor endorse? It is unlikely for complex reasons, including the lack of good-paying jobs in the state and lack of faith in higher education generally (Uehling, “Complete College Idaho”). The legislature passed a nonbinding resolution of support for CCI goals in 2016, describing the 60% figure as “a stretch goal,” but the resolution carried no additional funding, even though, as a state lawmaker noted, “Idaho is still spending less on higher education than it did in 2009” (Corbin). The *Idaho Education News* reported in 2016 that “progress toward the 60 percent goal has stagnated. Only 40 percent of young adults now hold a degree or certificate” (Corbin). Many students see little value in higher education, especially in a low wage state. In a 2016 survey study, University of Idaho researchers focused on graduating high school seniors with follow-up four months later, finding: “One-third of respondents were not fully convinced that more education would help them financially. Idaho’s average wage per job is among the lowest in the nation. Over time, the average wage gap between Idaho and the rest of the nation is increasing” (University of Idaho, McClure Center for Public Policy Research). In 2015, writer Daniel Walters offered comprehensive reporting on why Idaho students do not go to college, noting Idaho’s isolated geography, attitude of self-reliance, dwindling good paying jobs even with technical skills, and low national ratings of public schools (Walters).

Most of these factors are beyond the control of English faculty. If Idaho does not meet the 60% goal by 2020, it will not be because Idaho English Departments were resistant to a new approach, but instead embraced that approach, one that leads us to continue to hope.

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