Rethinking First-Year Writing through Co-Requisite Instruction
Proposal for Year 2

Pilot Team:
Director: Rebecca Brittenham, Associate Professor of English
Co-Director: Lee Kahan, Associate Professor and Acting Chair of English
Nancy Botkin, Senior Lecturer in English
Clayton Michaels, Lecturer in English
Joshua Rubin, Director of the Writer's Room
Julie Wells, CLAS Advisor

Abstract
We seek to pilot an “enhanced” version of ENG-W131 that will improve time-to-degree and student persistence without sacrificing program rigor. Under the current system, 70% of IU South Bend students have to complete a two-semester composition sequence (W130/W131). This pilot would enable the more motivated of these students to complete their writing requirement in one semester. W131 Enhanced sections will meet an additional period each week with a supplemental instructor (SI), who will reinforce the lessons from the course through small groups exercises and tutoring sessions. SIs will be experienced tutors from the Writers’ Room who have proven successful at tutoring first-year writing students. Through this use of SIs, the pilot team hopes to enable W131 Enhanced students to advance more quickly in their degrees and to give the valuable learning experience of designing and leading teaching activities under the tutelage of experienced instructors.

Year One: Work Accomplished to Date
The pilot team planned to run 3 sections of W131 Enhanced in the fall and spring semesters of 2014-15. However, we ran into a road block when we discovered that W131, unlike W130, had a variable credit limit of 3 credit hours. In February 2015, Lee Kahan submitted a CARMin proposal to adjust the variable credit hours to 4, but the CLAS Curriculum Committee did not act on the request until May. Unfortunately, the course approval process is not designed to deal with pilot courses. Consequently, the curriculum committee had a number of issues with the proposal that stemmed from the premise that all courses submitted through CARMin would become a permanent addition to the curriculum; for example, there was a long discussion of whether the course first needed to be approved by the General Education Committee and then the Senate, as a change to the General Education Requirements. Such discussions further delayed approval, which the CLAS committee finally granted in July and the Senate Committee in October. The request has now been approved at all levels of the CARMin process and will be offered in fall 2016.

The pilot team still made excellent use of this year by designing the W131 Enhanced curriculum and refining its approach to supplemental instruction. Indeed, the delay caused by CARMin turned out to be a blessing in disguise, since both the course design and instructional support proved more complicated than the team initially thought. The pilot team met bi-weekly during the fall semester to choose readings for the course and design a syllabus and assignments. Choosing the readings proved particularly challenging. Given
the reading comprehension skills of W130 students, the team needed to build a reading sequence that began at the W130 level and slowly built to the more complex readings of W131 by the end of the course. This meant finding a number of readings at an intermediate level of complexity. The team initially worked with Beth Theisen at McGraw Hill to design a customized e-reader that would meet the students’ needs. However, that plan was abandoned when McGraw-Hill’s software proved less than user-friendly and their support unreliable. Since no existing reader scaffolds selections according to their complexity, the team ended up creating its own custom reader by choosing readings from a number of first-year writing anthologies. Needless to say, this involved a lot of reading and much conversation before the team agreed upon readings that fit students’ needs and that all instructors would be comfortable teaching.

In addition, the pilot team met with Julie Wells to create a questionnaire that will help students determine whether W130 Enhanced is the right option for them. The form will be distributed to students at all placement exams. Members of the team also met with Dean of Undergraduate Studies Linda Chen and Rick Dennie to discuss how students will self-select for the course and how best to educate advisors about how to help students choose the right course for them (W130 or W131 Enhanced).

Because the course was not offered this fall, the supplemental instructors were asked to participate in the the course design process to help craft their role in the course. During these discussions, the committee came to realize how difficult it would be to sustain the two models that it described in the initial Vision 2020 proposal (using associate faculty in year 1 and peer mentors in year 2). With the reduction of the adjunct budget, the department was unable to rehire many of the associate faculty that it planned to use for supplemental instruction and even those who remain are looking for other work, due to the decrease in job stability. Moreover, the elimination of the Associate Director of First-Year Writing placed an increasing administrative burden on the Director, who therefore will not have the time to recruit or train peer mentors in the future if W131 Enhanced sections increase. Consequently, the team decided to turn to another prevalent model in supplemental instruction—bringing academic support staff into the classroom, rather than having students seek such academic support outside of class (Tinto).

Joshua Giorgio-Rubin suggested that, before making a decision, the team review the assessment data on the impact of our Writers’ Room on student success, and it was very impressed with the results that its tutors achieve with first-year writing students. For example, the C-DFW rate for the 68 W130 students who visited the Writer’s Room was 15%, compared to the 60% rate for the 103 students who did not use its services—a difference of 45%. Moreover, those W130 students who visited the writers room received grades .43 points higher on average than those who did not. The team therefore determined that, given its other challenges, it did not make sense to reinvent the wheel when the Writers’ Room is clearly achieving the desired results. The goal instead should be to increase the number of students who receive such support by having the tutors run the mandatory additional hour of instruction for W130 Enhanced. After reviewing his staffing, Joshua agreed to provide at least two Writers’ Room tutors per section. This will allow for more personal attention than our initial proposal, which only allotted one supplemental
instructor per 20-student course. These tutors will be paid an additional stipend to attend an orientation and monthly workshops on group tutoring. Based on the Writer’s Room assessment data, we hope that bringing the tutors to students will dramatically improve the C-DFW rate in the course, as it has done for W130.

Finally, the team determined, in consultation with Joshua, that using tutors as SIs is only sustainable if the tutoring staff increases alongside the increase in the number of W130 Enhanced sections. Because the tutoring center already employs students in the Master’s of Arts in English Program, the team is coordinating with the director of that program, Kyoko Takanashi, to explore the viability of assistantships for graduate students that would pay them a stipend to work in the Writers’ Room during their first year of study and then serve as supplemental instructors in their second year. Next year, the team plans to create a proposal for such an assistantship program that Professor Takanashi can present at a Graduate Council meeting in fall 2016. Such a measure would not only ensure a steady pool of tutors for W131 Enhanced but would likely increase applications to the English MA Program, given that such applications doubled when the department was given one-time money to pilot assistantships in 2009.

Year 2 Revised Plan
Pilot three sections of W131 Enhanced in Fall 2016 and three in Spring 2017 (as enrollments permit); i.e. 120 first-year undergraduates in the first year. The curriculum for these sections will be based on the design of readings, assignments, and course materials developed by the Pilot Team (Nancy Botkin, Joshua Giorgio-Rubin, and Clayton Michaels), who will also be teaching one section each in Fall 2016.

I. Work with the Writer’s Room to recruit and train tutors to provide supplemental instruction for the piloted sections. Joshua Giorgio-Rubin, the Writers’ Room Administrator, will enlist at least 6 experienced tutors from the Writers’ Room for each semester. That will enable us to assign a minimum of two dedicated tutors to each piloted section, one of whom will serve as the lead in working with the instructor to plan supplemental instruction activities for each week. The tutors will attend the Orientation for First-Year Writing teachers and meet with the lead instructors for the courses that they are assisting. They will occasionally attend the lead instructor’s class meetings as needed to observe the presentation of materials in order to understand and best support the lead instructor’s approach. Nancy Botkin and Joshua Giorgio-Rubin have received a Curriculum Development Grant that will supply them with summer salary to research and design an additional training protocol for these SIs that help tutors transition from the one-on-one assistance they normally provide to designing group activities that they will lead in their sessions and to implementing activities designed by the course instructors. Nancy and Joshua will also use the CDG funds to train First-Year Writing Instructors to make the most effective use of that SI assistance in providing a cohesive, collaborative pedagogy for Enhanced W131 students.

II. Work with the Professional Advisors Council (PAC) across campus to ensure that the opportunity to participate in the pilot is well-publicized to incoming students and that advisers are well-informed about how to help students decide
if the 4-credit course is right for them. CLAS adviser Julie Wells will explain the course and present the newly designed questionnaire at a PAC meeting.

III. Assess the effectiveness of the SI training. Joshua will observe the SI sessions several times during the first year, and the pilot team will administer surveys to SIs. Together, these measures should enable the team to gauge how well the orientation and additional training prepared tutors for the experience and to revise it accordingly.

IV. Assess W131 Enhanced by (1) comparing the success rate of its students with a control group of 120 ENG-W131 students who previously took ENG-W130 and (2) administering a survey of students about how well supplemental instructors are meeting their needs.

V. Work with the Director of the M.A. Program in English and the campus-wide Graduate Council to propose a financial aid package for graduate students that includes employment in the Writers’ Room, with an eye to serving as a supplemental instructor in the second year of their studies. This is necessary because the current number of tutors employed by the Writers Room cannot sustain on their own the full expansion of the Enhanced W131 project. Involving English MA students as trained Writers’ Room tutors with the potential to become supplemental instructors is crucial to the long-term stability and sustainability of Enhanced W131.

Year 3 Revised Plan
Revise curriculum and training materials as needed to reflect assessment outcomes and transition to an extended version of the pilot if those assessment outcomes are positive. This could mean as many as 240 first-year undergraduates would take W131 Enhanced in Fall 2017 and Spring 2018.

I. As indicated by assessment results, admissions numbers, and enrollment predictors, the department will increase the number of sections that it offers per semester and expand the recruitment and training of instructors beyond the original course design team. Instructors will include tenure-line faculty and fulltime lecturers; we will limit reliance on Associate Faculty unless campus budget considerations indicate available resources for the recruitment and support of part-time teachers as a sustainable long-term aspect of the Enhanced W131 program.

II. The pilot team will adjust curriculum as needed and revise the orientation and training for supplemental instructors based on assessment data, including student surveys and instructor feedback from the first year.

III. Joshua will continue to evaluate supplemental instructor performances and assess the effectiveness of the orientation and training as described in YR 2.III above. These responsibilities extend beyond his normal duties as Writers’ Room Administrator because he will be assessing the supplemental instruction curriculum and observing tutors leading classroom activities rather than performing one-on-one tutoring.

IV. The pilot team will continue assessment as described in YR 2.IV above. They will also compare success rates for students in ENG-Enhanced 2016-17 and ENG-W131 2017-18 to determine the relative effectiveness of the extended nature of the pilot including the new instructors and tutors and any curriculum adjustments.
V. If funding for graduate students to work in the Writers’ room and then later as SIs is approved, the pilot team will work with the English Department Graduate Studies Committee and the campus-wide Graduate Council to implement this program.

Budget

Year 1 Actual Expenditures:

- Course design team (Clayton Michaels, Nancy Botkin, Joshua Giorgio-Rubin) received $1500 each as Summer 2015 Salary = $4500.
- Supplemental Instructor Stipends: Erin Kelly, Nicole Koroch, and Richard Ellman received $150 each in their September 2015 paychecks = $450. The SIs worked with the course design team to define the role of supplemental instructors in delivering the curriculum as it was being developed. Their input helped to reveal potential problems with the initial design and jumpstarted the process of retooling our supplemental instruction plan for Year 2.

Year 2 Budget

- Supplemental pay for 6 Writers’ Room tutors to attend pre-semester orientation and monthly workshops on designing and leading group activities: $200 per class x 3 sections x 2 SIs per section = $1200. Note: SIs will also be paid at the standard hourly rate by the Writers’ Room for instructional hours in both F16 and S17.
- Supplemental pay for the pilot team to supervise supplemental instructors, conduct assessment, and make any needed adjustments to curriculum and training protocols: $1200 x 3 = $3600
- Total: $4800

Year 3 Budget

- Supplemental pay for 12 Writers’ Room tutors to attend pre-semester orientation and monthly workshops on designing and leading group activities: $200 per class x 6 sections x 2 SIs per section = $2400. Note: SIs will also be paid at the standard hourly rate by the Writers’ Room for instructional hours in both F16 and S17.
- Supplemental pay for pilot team to retool curriculum and training protocols as needed, run assessment, and train additional faculty to teach the course in Fall 2018: $500 x 3 = $1500.
- Stipend for faculty to attend workshop series on teaching W131 Enhanced and working with SIs: $100 x 10 = $1000.

Fiscal sustainability, including any current and future funding sources
The course design team received a CDG to design a supplemental instruction curriculum. In YR 2 and 3, the Writers’ Room will pay supplemental instructors for their in-class hours at the normal hourly rate. Beginning in YR 4, the Writers’ Room will pay tutors working as supplemental instructors their normal hourly rate both for their in-class hours and for their additional training. If our proposal to the Graduate Council is successful, the long-term sustainability for increasing the number of Enhanced W131 sections will be augmented by graduate student internships.
2016-17 Timeline

Spring 2016
- Julie Wells presents W131 Enhanced at a PAC meeting; other member of the design team attends to answer questions about the course.
- Course design team revises self-placement questionnaire to distribute at placement exams.

Summer 2016
- May-June: revise supplemental instruction component based on new plan to use Writers’ Room tutors; create training protocol for SIs (funded by CDG).
- Create questionnaires for students and tutors to give feedback to W131 Enhanced experience.
- August: Tutors attend First-Year Writing Orientation to learn about program goals and methods.

Fall 2016
- 3 sections of W131 Enhanced offered.
- Tutors attend monthly workshops with Joshua Rubin and/or another member of the pilot team to discuss problems and learn about additional group tutoring methods.
- Design team works with Kyoko Takanashi to craft proposal for graduate funding to work in Writers’ Room and then as SI in W131 Enhanced. Professor Takanashi presents proposal to Graduate Council.
- December: review answers to tutor and student questionnaires to determine what changes need to be made to the curriculum for Spring 2017 and the training program for fall 2017.

Spring 2017
- January: Complete assessment of Fall ’15 W131 Enhanced by comparing C-DFW rates with 120 randomly selected students who took W130/W131 sequence.
- 3 sections of W131 Enhanced offered.
- Subject to approval of funding, meet with Kyoko Takanashi to redesign application materials to indicate assistantship option.
- May: review surveys from tutors and students to assess changes from fall to spring. Complete assessment for first year by comparing C-DFW rates of S17 courses with those for 120 randomly selected students who took W130/W131 sequence and those for W131 Enhanced in F16. Based on assessment data, determine what changes need to be made to the course and whether data justifies increasing the number of sections.
- May: if data indicates that W131 Enhanced is successful or has the potential to be successful, recruit instructors for the additional three sections of W131 Enhanced that will be offered in F17.