Rethinking First-Year Writing through Co-Requisite Instruction
Proposal for Year 3

Pilot Team:
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Co-Director: Lee Kahan, Associate Professor of English and Associate Dean of CLAS
Design Team Faculty:
   Nancy Botkin, Senior Lecturer in English
   Clayton Michaels, Senior Lecturer in English
   Joshua Rubin, Senior Lecturer in English and Director of the Writers’ Room
Advising Liaison: Julie Wells, CLAS Advisor

Abstract:
In Fall 2016 we completed the initial pilot of an enhanced version of ENG-W131 designed to improve time-to-degree and student persistence without sacrificing program rigor. Under the traditional system, 70% of IU South Bend students need to complete a two-semester composition sequence (W130/W131) in order to fulfill their first-year writing, fundamental literacy requirement. If successful, the pilot will enable students who are strongly motivated and have a solid high-school GPA to complete their writing requirement in one semester. W131 Enhanced sections meet an additional period each week with supplemental instructors (SIs) who reinforce the lessons from the course through small group exercises and tutoring sessions. In the initial trial period (Fall 2016), SIs in each section were experienced Writers’ Room tutors with advanced (MA and PhD) degrees who also had prior experience as successful W131 teachers. An additional SI in each section was a former IU South Bend undergraduate with extensive Writers’ Room experience and proven success rates tutoring first-year-writing students. In future, we plan to incorporate more undergraduate Writers’ Room tutors and graduate students seeking teaching experience in the SI training program. Through this use of SIs, the pilot team seeks to enable W131 Enhanced students to advance more quickly in their degrees and to give future undergraduate tutors and graduate-student teacher trainees the valuable learning experience of designing and leading teaching activities under the tutelage of experienced instructors.

Year 2 Work Accomplished to Date:
In 2016 the 4-credit version of W131 was approved through the CARMIN system as a permanent addition to the curriculum and we were able to run three pilot sections in Fall 2016. The pilot team had developed the W131 Enhanced curriculum by sequencing readings and writing assignments designed to help students with W130-level reading comprehension and writing skills move from a basic challenge level to the more complex challenge level of the
reading and writing assignments required in W131. Using Curriculum Development Grant (CDG) funding, Nancy Botkin and Joshua Giorgio-Rubin created an additional curriculum for Supplemental Instructors. Joshua Giorgio-Rubin, the Writers’ Room administrator, chose three highly successful Writers’ Room tutors as supplemental instructors for the initial pilot. Two of these SIs were also successful W131 teachers with advanced degrees (an MA and a PhD respectively) who had combined responsibilities as part-time faculty and as Writers’ Room tutors; one took the lead SI role in labs for two pilot sections and the other took the lead SI role in the lab for the third pilot section. An additional SI in each section was a former IU South Bend undergraduate with extensive Writers’ Room experience and proven success rates tutoring first-year-writing students; she provided individual one-on-one instruction for students in the labs for all three sections.

Working with Julie Wells and the advising staff, the pilot team created a questionnaire to help students with W130 placements determine whether the W131 Enhanced would be the right option for them. Members of the team also met with the Office of Student Support advising staff to discuss how student could self-select into the course and how best to educate advisors about helping students with W130 placements choose the right course for them (W130 or W131 Enhanced).

- Initial Pilot Challenges:

The Fall 2016 pilot of three sections of Enhanced W131 proved to be a challenging initiation for all involved. Despite efforts to circulate the self-selection questionnaire, the majority of students enrolled in the course seemed initially unaware that they were taking part in a pilot project. This meant that one aspect of the course design was lacking: rather than prompting highly motivated students to knowingly attempt a challenging course and to commit to the additional time and workload involved, we began with a fairly random selection of students with W130 placements who happened to enroll in these sections. However, we felt that this initial challenge might prove to be a long-term benefit: should we be able to succeed with a group of students who approximated the norm for incoming students with W130 placements, this would increase the future potential for the pilot to serve a broader majority of students.

All three faculty instructors experienced challenges helping students with the reading comprehension levels and writing skills typical of W130 placements to build W131-level skills in a single semester. Although the initial readings and writing assignments had been crafted with this group in mind, the planned progression into more challenging readings and assignments proved to be enormously daunting for most students. The instructors worked tirelessly to provide additional review of basic skills, and to address individual student needs in the effort to support students through this process. In one section, the instructor radically restructured all the assignments and in-class activities to adapt to the prevailing learning styles among that group of
students. The faculty met regularly with one another to share strategies and evaluate the work students were producing, but uneven progress and varying results among students in the three sections made these sessions stressful and heightened concerns about the pilot project as a whole.

Concerned mid-semester that the experimental nature of the pilot could end up becoming a disservice to the students who enrolled in these sections, faculty worked with the two project co-directors, with the Chair of English, Jake Mattox, and with the Registrar’s Office to devise some final grade safeguards so that students with W130 placements would not be penalized by the attempt to reach W131 learning outcomes in a single semester. These safeguards included an “R” final grade option that would allow a student who did not achieve the learning outcomes for W131 at a passing (“C”) level but did achieve the outcomes for W130 at a passing (“C”) or higher level to receive a passing grade in W130 even if they did not pass the Enhanced W131 class.

The grading safeguard worked as follows:

**ENG-W 131 Pilot Grading, Fall 2016**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Student Achievement</th>
<th>Grading for Enhanced W131</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Achieved Learning Outcomes (LO) for W131 at a passing level</td>
<td>Enter “C” or above for Enhanced W131</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Did not achieve LO for W131 but did achieve passing level for W130</td>
<td>Enter “R” for Enhanced W131 and then send grade for W130 (4-credit) to Chair</td>
<td>Grade for W130 (4-credit) will be “C” or better. Counsel student to then enroll in traditional, 3-credit W131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Did not achieve LO for W131 and did not achieve LO at a passing level for W130</td>
<td>Enter “C-,” “D,” or “F” for Enhanced W131</td>
<td>Counsel student to enroll in ENG-W 130 (3 or 4 credits, depending upon student skill level). Student can eventually take W131 for grade replacement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pilot Readjustments

As it became clear through this initial trial period that the pilot as designed might not adequately serve a random sampling of students with W130 placements, the pilot team looked for ways to quickly adjust the design to re-test in Spring 2017. Based on recent institutional research data, the team learned that across the IU South Bend student population as a whole, students with high-school GPAs below a 2.7 had notably higher non-passing (C-/D/W/F) rates in W130 than students with a 2.7 high school GPA or above. Incoming students with high-school GPAs below 2.7 who placed into W130 were three times more likely to withdraw from the course and 2.5 times more likely to receive a C- or below in the course than students who placed into W130 but had high-school GPAs of 2.7 or above. Based on this data, we decided to limit the pilot sections of Enhanced W131 for Spring 2017 to students with high-school GPAs of 2.7 or above. This would maximize the potential success of students attempting the pilot and, along with the final grade safeguard outlined above, would ensure that students were protected throughout this trial period. While the new GPA cut-off limits the potential population of students we can serve with the Enhanced W131 option and may have repercussions for traditional sections of W130 that lose the mixed ability benefits of students with 2.7+ high-school GPAs, we felt that it was important to incorporate these findings into the pilot design.

Based on mid-semester predictions, even before a full assessment of the pilot was possible, we also decided to restrict our Spring 2017 offerings to two sections of Enhanced W131. This was partly because the new restriction of 2.7+ high school GPA would limit the available population and partly because we wanted to test whether the 2.7+ GPA distinction would have as crucial an impact on student success rates as predicted. We also gave the two instructors for the Spring 2017 sections (both of whom had taught the pilot in Fall 2016 and had experienced the challenge of the project) full autonomy in developing the assignment structures, classroom activities, and pedagogical strategies that their experience might supply.

Finally, we redoubled our efforts to ensure that students who enrolled in Enhanced W131 sections for Spring 2017 did fill out the self-placement questionnaire and were aware of and committed to participating in a pilot project.

Assessment:

We are currently in the process of assessing our results from the three pilot sections of Enhanced W131 from Fall 2017. With the help of a UCET workshop, we have developed a three-pronged assessment plan: Pass/Fail data in the pilot sections compared to a control group; course
1. Pass/Fail Data. We have requested from the Office of Institutional Research a breakdown of the Pass/Fail data (C and above/C- and below) for the 60 students in the three pilot sections compared to a control group consisting of the same number of students who also placed into W130 but enrolled in the traditional W130/W131 two-semester sequence. That data will help determine the overall success or failure of the pilot in that initial trial run. A preliminary review of the grades for the pilot sections alone shows that of the 57 students who enrolled, 28 completed W131 with a C or above and an additional 6 students received the “R” grade made possible through the pilot final grade safeguard (described above) and were assessed and passed at the W130 level. These preliminary findings suggest that the move to retool the pilot for Spring 2017 with the 2.7 high-school GPA cut-off was a necessary step.

2. Student Evaluation Responses:
As part of our assessment of the pilot, we wanted to get student feedback not only through standard course evaluations but on the components of the pilot itself. We hoped this would help us tease out for future iterations of W131 Enhanced, which of the various components students themselves found most helpful.

Therefore, on course evaluations for the three pilot sections we added the following question:

This Enhanced W131 Pilot course included several components that differentiate it from a standard W131 course

- smaller class size (20 students instead of the 22 students in a standard W131 class)
- an added credit hour of lab time
- a supplemental instructor available during lab time
- a tutor available during that lab time

Which component(s) did you feel were most helpful and/or least helpful and why?

A preliminary review of student responses to the added question suggests that a strong majority of students found the extra hour of lab time the most helpful component of the course. In commenting on the lab time, most emphasize the individualized instruction they received from the SI and the tutor as the most useful aspect of the lab. These two components of the pilot are, not surprisingly, undifferentiated in most student responses,
though a sprinkling of students mention that they received differing advice from the instructor, the SI, and the tutor, which they found confusing.

We plan a more in-depth analysis of student responses on the course evaluations, with particular attention to their responses on this added question.

3. Exit Interviews:

In addition to quantitative pass/fail data and qualitative responses from students, described above, we felt that feedback from the faculty and Supplemental Instructors about their experiences with the pilot would be invaluable in determining future retooling of the pilot design.

Exit Interviews with ENG-W 131 Enhanced Supplemental Instructors:

Jake Mattox, the Chair of English conducted interviews with each of the Supplemental Instructors. They described the experience overall as positive and productive but offered numerous specific suggestions for future improvements. These included:

- Reading comprehension seemed to pose a major obstacle for students. Working even more, early on, with reading comprehension, and assigning more accessible early readings would benefit students in the pilot.
- Since meetings between SIs and faculty were very useful in maintaining consistent communication with students, the pilot sections in future could adopt a more formalized, structured system of meetings.
- Clearly structured lab time seemed essential for keeping students working productively. Faculty could work with SIs in future to develop even more specific tasks to be accomplished in the lab.
- Because the labs were scheduled back-to-back with the class meetings, students were often hungry and tired by the time they reached the lab. This schedule could cause problems with productivity.

As part of the assessment process, we are reviewing these and additional SI suggestions in great detail. As a preliminary adjustment, we have suggested more formalized meetings between faculty and SIs and collaborative determination of lab activities. We have also adjusted the lab meeting time for one section in the Spring 2017 schedule so that it meets on a different day than the class. The comparison between students’ productivity in the labs for the two sections may help us determine how important the scheduling of lab time will be to future scheduling of Enhanced W131 sections.

Exit Interviews with W131 Enhanced Faculty: At the end of the Fall 2016 semester, the Chair of English, Jake Mattox, and the two project co-directors conducted a preliminary
exit conversation with the three faculty members teaching the pilot. Faculty were still compiling their final grades and were under end-of-semester pressures, so we intend to continue this conversation at a less stressful time. Two of the three faculty members were particularly concerned about the future success of the pilot and its efficacy for students. The third faculty member was more optimistic about the success rates of students in his/her section and the future of the pilot. This particular faculty member had radically restructured assignment and activities in that section and the pass rate for that section was higher. Based on this conversation, we felt that the decision to limit Spring 2017 pilot sections to students with 2.7+ high-school GPAs was an important initial adjustment. We also plan to research the high-school GPA profile of the students in those three initial sections to see if that data teaches us something about the differing student success rates across the three sections. Finally, we plan to implement as many of the productive innovations adopted by all three faculty members in future curriculum development and teacher training for sections of Enhanced W131.

Year 3 Revised Plan

I. Revise the structure of the pilot, including scheduling of labs, 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. In the meantime, we will restrict offering of Enhanced W131 to no more than four sections per semester in Fall 2017 and Spring 2018.

II. 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.

III. 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.

IV. 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.
V. The pilot team will continue assessment as described 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.

VI. Continue to 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. 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 Actual Expenditures:

- 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 were also 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.
Total $4,900

2017-18 Timeline
Spring 2017

● January: Complete assessment of Fall 2016 W131 Enhanced using the three measures described above.
  2 sections of W131 Enhanced offered to students with high school GPAs of 2.7 or above
  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 pass/fail data from F16 and S17 to the control groups, using student feedback on evaluations, and exit interviews with faculty and SIs. Based on assessment data, determine what changes need to be made to the course and whether data justifies increasing the number of sections.

● June: 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.

● August: run 4 sections of Enhanced W131 in Fall 2017 and continue assessment and readjustment.

Fiscal sustainability, including any current and future funding sources:
In YR 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.