

The English 1A Faculty from El Camino College and El Camino Compton College met on Friday, November 30, 2012, as the first meeting in a three-part series studying the English department's consistency in terms of composition assignments and grading. This project evolved from a general concern shared by English 1C teachers that students coming from English 1A lacked a basic level of writing skill and analysis.

Prior to the meeting, 1A faculty members were requested to send their assignment for the research paper, which is a required part of the course and meets the student learning outcome for the course. While a majority of the assignments submitted fit within the general guidelines and expectation of the research paper as stated in the course outline of record, there were assignments that differed significantly in purpose and rigor. This difference will be further explored in the coming semester to ensure that all faculty who are teaching 1A are preparing students through a research-based assignment that involves use of college-level reading material and requires the student to take a position on a given topic. An assignment of this nature would fit the norms and rigor of other freshman composition courses offered throughout the state and the rest of the country.

The meeting began with faculty looking at three possible common essay prompts so every faculty member teaching 1A could give a universal assignment for the department to assess. After much discussion, faculty chose a prompt that allowed for some individuation but shared common traits in terms of number of sources and essay length. After this, the faculty members brainstormed some concerns they share at the beginning of the semester after the first student papers come in and instructors can make a true assessment of the skill levels entering the course.

Challenges students have at the beginning of 1A:

- Lack of language fluency for both native and non-native speakers; students have trouble discerning between spoken vs. written language.
- Organization of essay and logical thought
- Writing in response to reading
- Lack of vivid detail in essays
- Lack of ability to self-edit for basic errors in mechanics, grammar, and spelling
- ESL students are underprepared for the reading because there is no requirement for them to take ESL 52C (Advanced Reading) before entering English 1A whereas native speaker students must take English 84 before taking 1A. English 84 addresses reading needs for the 9th-12th grade level. ESL 52B (Intermediate Reading and Vocabulary Building), the only prerequisite in reading for ESL students currently, covers 6th-8th grade level.
- Basic grammar for both native and non-native speakers.
- Essays lack clarity and coherence.
- Revisions should be more than just spellcheck.

General concerns that are not specific to composition but that affect 1A students:

- Course overload/life overload

- No resources available for evening students such as Writing Center, LRC.
- Many students lack strong work ethic, expect A's for mediocrity

End of semester concerns for 1A students continuing into 1C:

- Even though some growth is shown in prior essays throughout the semester, when the research essay comes, all prior knowledge seems to “disappear.”
- There are still issues with incorporating sources logically and stylistically.
- Student application of MLA format still lacks consistency.
- Students seem to have a disconnect that skills gained in this course can and should be used in other courses in other divisions when they are assigned papers.

A natural progression of this discussion was to look at some of the concerns that 1C instructors had at the beginning of the semester. Many of the faculty present are both 1A and 1C instructors and could speak to this matter. Earlier in the afternoon, a faculty member read excerpts from several 1C essays that highlighted the urgency for a consistency project.

Challenges students have at the beginning of 1C:

- Evaluating argument and evidence
- Finding credible sources
- Argument refutation without using faulty logic
- Logic in general
- For some who delayed taking 1C after completing 1A, skills have faded.
- Some students still are entrenched in the 5-paragraph essay mentality.