Title of Grant: A Comparative Study of Student Learning Outcomes for Research Papers in Dual Enrollment and On-Campus English 111 and 112 Courses

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Abstract: This study will measure competencies of students in dual enrollment (DE) and on-campus English 111 and 112 courses in order to assess the rigor and effectiveness of DE courses, and to identify student performance and evaluation trends. The study will use department, college, and VCCS standards to design course-specific Competency Evaluation Rubrics (CERs) that measure student learning outcomes (SLOs). The tools, methods, and results will be shared with campus and college administration and with other institutions as a model for similar assessment on a larger scale. Further, the data will contribute to the effective assessment and implementation of DE programs in general.

Actual Outcomes:

Faculty and College Administrators: Our research project provides a starting point for further exploration of the relationship between DE and on-campus classes, which we believe will be very valuable to the NOVA-Annandale English department and college administrators. In regard to the English department, we plan to present our findings at one of the first faculty meetings of the fall semester. We expect that we will not only be able to give a snapshot of the DE and on-campus student achievement assessments, but also to make the case for a regular programmatic assessment. We expect that the data provided to our colleagues will make clear the importance of collecting assessment data on a semester or yearly basis as it gives us essential information about the general effectiveness of our teaching as a department. We can also make faculty aware of immediate problems (such as weaknesses in demonstrating MLA style) so that they may make these priorities in their own classes. Further, we expect that the Competency Evaluation Rubrics (CERs) that we developed for this project may serve as the foundation for a department-wide assessment tool if and when the time of departmental evaluation does come. For college administrators, we hope that our data provides a starting point for a larger assessment of the DE program in general. Because our sample size is relatively small, we do not feel an institutional assessment of the program can be made. However, having built the procedural structure for this research project, we feel we will be better able to expand the project to an assessment of all NOVA campuses and their respective DE programs.

Students: We expect that future DE and on-campus students will benefit from teaching that is more targeted toward the respective areas in which each demographic struggles. For instance, we hope that DE students will receive more instruction on how to effectively organize their research essays and develop ideas in a more artful and effective manner. On a more longitudinal level, we hope that eventually the achievement levels between DE and on-campus sections grow closer together to ensure that students receive the same level of instruction no matter where they earn their college credit.

Other Colleges: N/A
Discussion and Critique:

Based on the preliminary data we have analyzed and the scholarly writing we have read concerning DE courses, we see that our study has confirmed many of the qualitative observations made about such course formats. For instance, while students taking college credit in high schools demonstrated accomplishments in writing clearly, they often struggled with skills that demanded higher level thinking such as organization. But because our sample size was so small, we guard against making blanket statements about the role of DE courses within the community college curriculum. Certainly, though, this research will help us scale DE research to the other NOVA campuses and perhaps other colleges throughout the VCCS. Our goal was to create a model for a future expansion of DE course research and we do consider our work to be successful in providing such a baseline.

One of the gaps of understanding that we are currently trying to remedy concerns the relationship between the level of achievement in one dimension of the Competency Evaluation Rubric as compared to another. For instance, we would like to examine whether papers that exhibit success in constructing an effective thesis also demonstrate success in supporting that thesis. We are working to calculations to analyze these cross-dimensional relationships, and plan to make that a priority for similar research projects in the future.

We would also like to answer the question of how teacher experience affects student outcomes. Because we wanted to maintain anonymity as much as possible, we did not interview the teachers participating in this research project. In the future, however, we imagine that the background of participating teachers may be an important metric in understanding how students learn and that recording that information should be an important step in determining whether teacher experience has more or less impact than how the courses are take (i.e., on campus or at local high schools). Lastly, we know from the published literature on DE courses that grade and grade inflation is sometimes a concern. Therefore, we would like to develop a method for recording the grades given to papers in addition to our own methods for assessment. This would reveal if the grades given in DE courses are generally higher than those given for the same type of achievement in on-campus courses.

Evaluation:

In our grant application, we laid out five measures for success. We met the four short-term goals of the project: two course-specific CERS, a report on initial findings in DE and on-campus courses, a framework and methodology for repeating the study, and a model to assist others departments in developing similar studies. We plan to begin working on our longer-term measure, to expand the study beyond our campus to other NVCC locations and VCCS institutions.

Dissemination:

We expect to present our findings to English faculty members at the bi-annual VCCS peer group meeting in the fall of 2012 so as to offer guidance in developing similar studies at other campuses and to promote the effectiveness of measuring student learning outcomes on a regular basis. More immediately, we expect to present our research process and findings to NOVA faculty at the Pick Up Your Pedagogy conference that will be held on the NOVA-Annandale campus in January 2012 to educate adjunct and full-time faculty on the specific needs and successes that various courses and course formats (i.e., DE and on-campus) exhibit. Our proposal "How to Make and Measure Outcomes" was just accepted to the Community College Humanities Association National Conference in Fort Worth, TX this
October. We plan to present our process for developing evaluation metrics at this conference. Once we have processed all of our data, we plan to propose a presentation for the 2013 Conference on College Composition and Communication.

After speaking with several experts in the field of dual credit English composition courses at the 2011 Conference on College Composition and Communication, we found that they were unanimously supportive of our research project and were excited about the prospect of quantifiable student learning outcome assessment of DE programs. We believe that this research is novel and very pertinent to composition studies and look forward to communicating our findings to others in the field. We have applied to make a presentation at the National Community College Humanities Association Conference in October and we also plan to present at the Two-Year College English Association Southeast Conference in February, 2012 and the national conference for the Two-Year College English Association. In the future, we intend on writing an article based on our findings and submitting it to the journals Inquiry, Teaching English in the Two-Year College, and College Composition and Communication.