Basic Skills Initiative Project Report

Ways of Supporting ESL Students in the Writing Center

Date:  February - December 2011

Participants:

Project Coordinators:  Rebecca Beal, Ingrid Kelly, Beth Patel, Cara Statucki

Video Production:  Andy Haber

Workshop Participants:  21 participants from ESL, English, English Skills, and the Writing Center

Research/Materials Contributors:  COM instructors including Beth Sheofsky, David King, Jo Muilenberg, Jeff Cady, Linda Lieberman, Marty Sukoski, Barbara Bonander, and COM students from 98SL, 120, 120SL, and 150 classes.

*Project was originally designed, written, and led by Win Cottle*

Project Rationale:

Teachers and tutors in the English Department would like to be better equipped to support non-native English speaking students. According to the 2010 Educational Master Plan for 2009-2019, approximately 25% of students in the Basic Skills Pathway do not speak English as their primary language. Known as English Language Learners (ELL) or ESL students, this population is expected to grow. In the English Department, formal professional development opportunity in this area has never been offered and Department members would like to be better equipped to work with this type of student. This project aims to improve the ways that ELL/ESL students are supported in the Writing Center.

Methodology:

Step 1:  Background Research

We began by meeting bi-monthly in February of 2011 to discuss the overall approach to the project and gathered research from textbooks, research, and best practices already being used by instructors and ISs both here at COM and from other schools. We looked over sample papers, discussed various approaches to working with ESL students one on one, the needs of the department, and began to look at various models for tutor training at the community college level. Based on this research and the needs of the Writing Center, we determined the type of written materials we would need, the format for the video we would make, and made a plan for the final workshop.

Step 2:  Production of video and written materials for the final workshop
**Written Materials:** Based on our research, we began to write the materials for the workshop. The handouts, which will be disseminated at the workshop and will be available both in the Writing Center and the Online Writing Center, are:

- A tutoring checklist which is modeled after the one currently in the Writing Center but has a more developed section for sentence structure and grammar
- A worksheet of the six most common treatable global errors that ESL students make with sample exercises to model with students
- A handout with six strategies for approaching ESL grammar errors, based on the research we did and on the input of COM teachers and students. This handout accompanies the strategies introduced in the video.
- A handout of
- An evaluation form of the workshop for feedback and

**Writing Center Video:** In October of 2011, we began to film the video that will be used at the December workshop and for subsequent training workshops. We each used camcorders to interview students and instructors in both the English and ESL Department to find out Writing Center staff questions/concerns around tutoring ESL students, backgrounds about our student writers and approaches these students felt were valuable in supporting their writing development, and approaches that our COM ESL instructors use when working with ESL students. Andy Haber filmed the introduction, conclusion, one-on-one tutoring sessions with student volunteers from the English and College Skills Department, and edited the whole piece.

**Step 3: Dissemination and Feedback**

**Workshop Planning:** In November of 2011, we began to plan for the workshop and decided to include both ESL and English Department instructors and ISs. We hoped that by bringing both departments, we could begin to share the expertise of the faculty and staff when discussing the video and materials. We made a flier and emailed it out to the English Department, Writing Center staff, and College Skills instructors. We also placed fliers in mailboxes, made announcements, and posted fliers for the workshop.

**Workshop:** On December 13, we held a workshop in BCC 101 with lunch included. The workshop was organized to incorporate as much inter-departmental discussion. After introductions, we played segments of the video and stopped continually to discuss questions/strategies brought up in the video and shared strategies and approaches related to these topics. We followed up with small-group discussions on sharing more questions and strategies about supporting ESL learner success. We documented the questions and strategies suggested by participants and will incorporate these on the Online Writing Center website. Likewise, the participants compiled a list of resources, such as textbooks and a shared Wiki site, which would further support teachers around this issue.
The feedback we received from this workshop was very positive:

### Results based on 15 completed surveys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The video of teacher and student interviews was a useful technique to generate discussion about relevant issues</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The opportunity to have both ESL and English instructors and tutors meet and discuss this issue was valuable</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through the discussions in this workshop, I was able to share experiences I have had working with ESL students</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Through the discussions in this workshop, I learned new strategies to respond to ESL students in a tutoring session or in the classroom</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I will be able to use the written materials from this workshop to more effectively respond to ESL students in a tutoring session or in the classroom</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall, I believe I will be able to apply the information/concepts/skills presented in the workshop to my own teaching or tutoring</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would come to similar workshops that bring together faculty from the College Skills and English Departments to discuss relevant topics</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What did you like BEST about the workshop? Suggestions for improvement?

- Sharing ideas from colleagues.
- Teachers sharing their strategies.
- Stopping the video and discussing each section.
- Interaction between departments.
- Chance to discuss teaching ESL students with ESL teachers.
- I like the open conversation about problems and strategies.
- Sharing strategies and hearing from the English Department how they approach writing.
- All of it! The presenters’ professional styles AND the chance to discuss teaching challenges and strategies with colleagues.
- Teaching suggestions that one could immediately use in the classroom.
- Resources from teachers regarding what they do in class and books.

What information, strategies, etc. that you learned today are you mostly likely to apply to your own work here at COM?

- I liked the idea of leaving a model outline on the board and asking students to write a paragraph following the model outline.
- Various strategies for helping students with their writing.
- We need a resource of ESL books in the writing labs.
- I’m interested in getting a copy of They Say, I Say to use with my students.
- Books that should be in writing lab that will help ESL students.
• *Wiki*
• *Working one-on-one with English language learners in the lab and in office hours.*
• *Scaffolding readings in class to help build context.*
• *Developing strategies for approaching cultural literacy.*
• *Review paragraph parts, write with students on board, ask them to write paragraph, ask students to find paragraph parts in peers’ work.*

**Step 4: Assessment of the Project and Future Plans**

• All materials produced from this grant will be available to Writing Center staff and COM instructors in the Writing Center and the Online Writing Center beginning spring of 2012. At faculty and staff meetings in 2012, we will encourage all teachers in our program to use this material as a resource when supporting ESL students.

• This workshop could work as a possible FLEX presentation in the future or repeated again for English instructors and ISs who couldn’t attend the workshop. This will provide a college-wide forum to raise awareness about how to best support our ESL students at COM

• There are several suggestions made at the workshop that would be great follow-up projects, including the following:
  - Online resources (Wiki?) for sharing curriculum/textbooks for classes across all departments; a video
  - A video for students to watch about how to ask for help at our labs
  - Further opportunities for instructors to collaborate across departments in workshops like these

• Resources that participants suggested would help support their own instruction/tutoring of ESL students:
  - Longman Advanced Dictionary of American English for the lab. The dictionary is designed for ESL learners with common word collocations, etc.
  - A section of the Writing Center bookshelves for ESL books and resources both for instructors and for students
  - Betty Azar’s grammar textbooks and/or chart books for grammar rules, models, and examples
  - Focus on Grammar software installed in the Writing Center to refer students to
  - Text to Speech software installed in all labs so that students can hear their papers read to them through computer software.
  - Headphones in the Writing Center so that students can use audio resources like Text to Speech software for personal editing of papers.
Overall, we were very encouraged by the level of support and enthusiasm that this project generated. When we asked participants in the survey if they would come to similar workshops that bring together faculty from the College Skills and English Departments to discuss relevant topics, every person who responded to this question “strongly agreed.” Likewise, participants overwhelming identified that the most helpful aspect of this workshop was having the opportunity to interact with and learn from faculty from other departments. It is our hope that this project will be a catalyst for an increased level of cooperation and collaboration among the members of the English and College Skills Departments as we share expertise, discuss challenging pedagogical questions, and build strategies to better support the success of our ESL student population.

Respectfully submitted by:

Ingrid Kelly
Date 12/15/2011

Rebecca Beal
Date 12/15/2011

Beth Patel
Date 12/15/2011

Cara Statucki
Date 12/15/2011