English 120AC – Dedicated Tutors Pilot Project

Final Report / Spring 2013
Submitted by Cheo Massion & Caitlin Rolston
June 13, 2013

Words above are collected comments from Eng120AC students at the end of the semester: “How would you describe the English 120AC course to another student?” Larger font = greater frequency of mention
Dedicated Tutors English120AC – Final Report / Spring 2013

Project Rational
Dedicated tutors have been in College Skills English classes since spring 2011. The concept of offering an accelerated section of English98/English120 is new to the college this semester, and two sections were offered this spring semester 2013: one section taught by Meg Pasquel and another by Blaze Woodlief.

The course was developed collaboratively by Blaze Woodlief, Meg Pasquel, Karen Koenig, Cara Kreit and Cheo Massion. The course outline was approved by the Curriculum Committee in spring 2012, for a start date of spring 2013. The team also applied for and was accepted into a community of practice in accelerated learning and training sponsored through the 3CSN California Acceleration Project (CAP). Meetings and training sessions were attended in June 2012, September 2012, and February 2013. All on the team have worked together to create the course outline, develop materials, a reader and assignments for the course, and create effective support through the dedicated tutoring program and other resources.

The BSI Steering Committee was approached to fund the Eng120AC dedicated tutors for their tutoring time (4 hours/week) and for some development and group meeting time. Caitlin Rolston was the DT in Meg’s section, and Cheo Massion was the DT in Blaze’s section.

Objectives
- Based on the overall concept of the dedicated tutor program in College Skills, provide tutoring sessions to Eng120AC students – all students in each section.
- Due to the new accelerated course content and format, as with the initial DT pilot project, we wanted to experiment using DTs to see how best to make use of the extra support and tutoring with students in these sections.

Tutoring offered
- DTs were paid to attend select classes and provide tutoring outside the class meeting times (4 hours/week). There was flexibility in the schedule so that from week to week the total hours could range from 2 to 6 hours per week. Additional support was provided via email.
- Students in Blaze’s section were able to make use of Cheo’s normally scheduled office hours on Mondays and Wednesdays. For some students this extra time on non-class days was an added benefit to obtain tutoring.
- Students in Meg’s section were also able to meet with Caitlin in the Writing Center on Thursdays when she had regular IS hours scheduled.
Materials developed
- The “green’ course reader was developed.
- Moodle sections were developed – on grammar resources, resource information for papers on stereotyping and gender roles.
- A few in-class handouts

What DTs did
- Attended one to two hours of class per week on average.
- Provided one-on-one tutoring sessions, generally after class; helped with all phases of the writing process from idea generation, organization, development and using academic sources
- Worked with students or a student in the class on outlines, using quotes or developing details, editing
- Provided feedback via email (done more towards the middle of semester once a relationship had been established)
- Wrote and provided model topic sentences or body paragraphs for assignments; used these items as models during tutoring sessions
- Provided feedback to the instructor as to a particular student’s situation/writing after tutoring sessions with the student
- Provided ideas for activities/general sounding board to instructor

Results
It worked well to have the DT attend more actual class time than has been done in College Skills classes. As Eng120AC has five hours/week of class time, more time devoted in class for writing workshops was done and using the DT for this purpose helped.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Eng120AC 11783</th>
<th>Eng120AC 11784</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CRN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First census</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawals (Ws, FWs)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Ss (who finished)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passed (Grade C or better, or P)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Pass Rate (w/o Ws)</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>71%</td>
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Having both the DT tutoring hours and the instructor’s office hours are beneficial to student’s busy schedules. Still, in both sections, the DTs were under-utilized, so either the time allotted for the DT on a weekly basis should be adjusted down or different attempts to increase the time students spend with the DT should be tried in the fall semester. We have enough data now that shows when students meet with their DT consistently, their writing improves and they gain more confidence as academic writers.
### Student Survey on DTs

<table>
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<tr>
<th>CRN</th>
<th>Eng120AC</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CRN</td>
<td>11783</td>
<td>11784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number in class (minus Ws)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% working w/DT (outside of class)</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number Ss who took survey B</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level satisfaction w/DT</td>
<td>55% H 36% AA 20% A</td>
<td>80% H 40% H 20% A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level satisfaction w/other tutors</td>
<td>18% H 36% AA</td>
<td>40% H 20% A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want DT in future class (VI + N)</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% students who had never worked with tutor before (all)</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Feel more comfortable(^a)</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Understand writing process better(^b)</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Improved quickly(^c)</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Survey B – students worked with the DT outside of class
\(^b\) H = High; AA= Above Average; A = Average; L = Low; VI = Very important; N = It would be nice
\(^c\) Working with a dedicated tutor has helped me
  - (A) feel more comfortable asking for help with my writing. (Agree only)
  - (B) understand the writing process better overall. (Agree only)
  - (C) improve my writing process more quickly. (Agree only)

### Qualitative comments from student surveys:

- I believe my speech has improved as well as my writing.
- DT spent time with each individual/explained an issue clearly. Flexibility of her time was good (office hour, in WC and by email). I have changed my way of thinking. Thinking I can always learn and learn more; it’s hard but we can all do it with the help of our teacher.
- She helped me think through an issue. I have become a better writer.
- She revised my work and corrected the things that I need. (advice) Read the book more than once. I want to improve more because I know I can do it.
- She spent a lot of time and was very nice and helpful. (I have changed a lot.) I feel a lot more confident with my work and I know more. Loved the class.
- My writing has definitely improved and tutors have helped me expand my analysis.
- She helped me brainstorm. I think this class was such a great experience.
- I feel my confidence has grown - not beating myself up anymore.
- My DT was very detailed and helpful. She finds the foreseeable problems and takes the time to help you understand concepts with your personalized writing style. Be prepared to be very busy on the weekends.
- Should tell everyone how much reading there is going to be.
- I have become more dedicated towards my assignments.
- I can write better essays than I did before. I learned how to use quotes and works cited.

Reasons students did not work with DT (outside of class):

- Worked with instructor instead
- Too busy; schedule conflict
- I worked with her in class and that was all the help I needed.
Student Profiles – a Qualitative Assessment

Student V

If I had to characterize Student V as a student in this class, she would be the ideal student that this class was designed for. She is a second-language learner who graduated from a high school in Marin, successfully completed English 92 at COM, and has a clear academic goal – to become a nurse.

At the very beginning of the semester, Student V had doubts that she could do the work. She voiced concern about using computers and Moodle, and the pace of the class. She persisted. She came to class, participated in class and did the necessary homework. Her first paper showed weak organization, lack of development and many grammar errors. She got help from the DT and the instructor, wrote several drafts but needed to re-write the first paper for a better result. She did that willingly and on time. Her next two papers showed steady improvement in all aspects, including correct referencing of sources in the third paper. She has gotten regular help on grammar points. Her third paper was an “A” – and showed significant progress in her critical thinking skills and analysis of the topic.

At one point, she was embarrassed that she didn’t know how to send an email with an attachment. Once shown how to do this, she has used tutoring support via email. She has also consistently come to outside tutoring sessions – on class days and alternate days also. It is obvious that she has positively shifted in her self-confidence as a writer, and herself as a student. She earned an “A” grade for the semester. (CM)

Student R

Student R is in his early 30s, and while he had trepidation about the class, he knew he would make if he stayed focused, did the homework and wasn’t overly anxious to get outside help. He wrote in his advice letter to new students; “The best advice I can give is try not to miss class, do your homework and take advantage of all your resources.” He maintained good balance for most of the semester except towards the end when his job demanded more hours, and he struggled more to complete the last two assignments on time and do them well.

Student R had more direction because of his life experience. He knew that going to college at this age for him was a new opportunity – one that he felt he hadn’t taken advantage of ten years ago. With respect to his writing, he had good writing skills and need help at the beginning with organization and development. What was very new to him was the academic aspect of papers #3-#5 – using qualified sources, quoting correctly and creating accurate works cited information. At one point he wanted to use text without correct acknowledgement, but once shown that isn’t done, he easily accepted the advice; he needed to be reminded that his thoughts on the specific topic were of value as much as the cited source.

He was intermittent about seeking outside help, but made good use of resources: the Writing Center, the instructor and the DT. He earned a final grade of “A” for the course. (CM)
Student A

Student A, a bright, motivated student, began the semester with many ESL-level language problems and scattered thinking that needed to be reined in. Student A sent his papers to me regularly and saw me repeatedly to work on each and every one. While many of his ESL errors persisted throughout the semester, a huge leap was made in terms of his overall writing and organization. While, at first, Student A struggled to categorize his thinking and keep to his topics, his careful attention and his persistent work ethic allowed him to make a quite astonishing breakthrough by the end of the semester. A naturally prolific writer and thinker, he needed help at times to focus and develop each of his thoughts with more depth, something we worked on extensively at the beginning, but which he effectively mastered by the end of 120AC. In his last two essays I was only correcting sentence-level errors and encouraging him to work on his grammar so that he would be more confident in expressing his ideas in his own words. Still, both Meg and I worried that his sentence-level grammar errors would be an impediment in 150, and I suggested that he take a one-unit grammar class in the lab the next semester, or even that he buy a grammar workbook and dedicate a few months to practicing writing in English at that level. In many ways, he was a typical high-level student in this section of 120AC — extremely able in many areas but with deficiencies in others. Though I tutored him extensively, I attribute his success mostly to his hard work, humble nature, and willingness to seek help. At one point, Student A mentioned to me, “My classmates must be so intelligent; I never see them in here getting tutoring [from you]!” His willingness to put in as many hours as it might take, coupled with his eagerness to seek and receive advice, were boons to his ultimate success — by far surpassing that of many of his native-speaking counterparts in the class. (CR)

Student B

I had known Student B for two semesters and worked extensively with her in ENG 92 before she moved to ENG 120AC. Both Meg and I had doubts about her ability to successfully complete the course; these doubts were confirmed throughout the semester. Though she worked with me regularly, her work never advanced and she did not pass the course. I know that Student B felt comfortable working with me, but I’m not sure that she accurately judged her own standing in terms of skills, either at the end of ENG 92 or throughout the 120AC semester. She met with me for most papers, but these meetings often seemed cursory or premature, and frequently took place only during the brainstorming state or during the final 15 minutes before a final draft was due, when there was very little we could work on together. By the end of the course, Student B still lacked basic skills in reading and writing that she would have needed to develop in order to pass. It would have taken more time, effort, and guidance, guidance that 120AC couldn’t spend enough time on, for her to pass. Often, our tutoring sessions were focused more on uncovering material that she could write about, but that content we discussed never quite appeared in her essays. I feel like a student like Student B could have benefited far more from the more relaxed environment of an ENG 98, where she could have safely repeated the structure and worked on the development of her ideas in essay after essay, starting from what she was comfortable with and working slowly toward more critical thinking. If given the semester over again to serve her better, I would have spent less time with her at the brainstorming stage, looking for material, and more time structuring more complex sentences, editing, summarizing, and analyzing. (CR)
**Student C**

Student C was the least “conventional” college student in the class, and the most insecure writer and reader in this section; she was also one of the most dedicated, and made great improvements over the course of the semester. I worked with her at nearly every stage of each paper, but one thing that made her truly stand out was her desire to, as she put it, “be in the driver’s seat” of each essay. Though there were times when this self-reliance manifested itself as stubbornness, it ultimately taught her (and me) a great deal about her own learning style, writing style, and writing and reading skills. An older student and mother, what Student C lacked in background, she made up for with hard work. Like Student A, she possessed a certain hard-headedness which at times made it difficult for her to conform to idea-level suggestions I made when certain ideas were disjointed, off-topic, or confusing — but that same stubbornness, I am convinced, was what enabled both of them to succeed in the class. She herself expressed that her “academic insecurity” was what most stood in her way, an insecurity which I saw diminished by the end of the semester. Student C was not afraid to admit to this insecurity or seek help, something which made a significant difference in her improvement and in her final grade. She put in more hours in the lab than any other student and sometimes came to see me three days a week. Her emails tapered off towards the end of the semester; simultaneously, her comprehension of my comments skyrocketed. For Student C, a personal connection with what she was writing was paramount and the absence of that personal connection was what caused her most difficulty. But as she grew more experienced and confident over the course of the semester, she also was able to wean herself from that need. By the end of the semester, I didn’t have to work with her on the major structure of her writing anymore. The comments I made which could transform her essays were mere tweaks; it was clear that she’d already put in the work, not just on individual essays, but on her writing in general. (CR)

**Recommended changes for next semester**

Availability of the tutor is critical. Flexibility in the tutor’s schedule is ideal, too. In addition to what worked well for this semester, here are suggestions for changes in the fall semester.

- Outreach is critical. DTs tell the students: “I’m a resource for you to help you get your work done so you can be successful in this class. Use me.”
  - In the first introduction to the class, instructors/DTs may want to think about what is important to be presented to the new students. As we know that students are afraid or insecure to ask for help, DTs could comment that seeing a DT for a small question or a large question is perfectly acceptable and expected.
- Inform students as to what a tutoring session is, for example:
  - Give students a “mock session” in class – ‘see what you get in a session outside of class’ – see how it can help you; see it isn’t scary
  - After 1st paper - give Ss a survey with these Qs: What did you get on the paper? Did you work with your DT or instructor? What was the easy part of writing the paper? Hard part? How many hours outside of class did you put into writing/reading for this class? (Helps raise awareness)
Skills workshops (developed by DTs and/or other BSI efforts) could be of great benefit. For example students who are embarrassed to ask about ‘how to do’ something on the computer or in their writing (such as correct punctuation) could get this information and initial practice in a workshop setting. An individual student would not have to divulge a deficiency as he/she learns along with other students doing the same work.

- Suggested workshops for Eng120AC course goals:
  - annotation
  - writing summaries
  - citing resources/using quotes correctly
  - formatting documents (use Word, cut/paste from Gmail docs)
  - using flash drives/Dropbox
  - using class Moodle pages
  - time management

Eng120AC instructors may require the students to meet with the DT for part of their required lab time for the semester. Of the 2 lab hours/week, a student could be asked to meet with the DT every other week to work on some aspect of their paper or writing skills. Message to students at the beginning of the semester: This is part of the class.

- Students need help with time management. They have lots of demands outside of the class. Requiring scheduled appointments with the DT could help them get their work done at school and ease their stress. The tutoring has to be valuable for students so they don’t see it as a waste of time. [Perhaps ask: what is the one thing to accomplish today on your writing assignment?]

- Give students a detailed survey to fill out as to their other classes (schedule) and outside work schedule. This kind of information could help facilitate the scheduling of DT hours.
  - i.e., what’s your schedule outside of class? Job? Hours? Days on campus? Any regular hours allotted for studying? Family commitments (re: times not available)? What other classes are you taking? This would be proactive inquiry – as “students don’t do optional.”

- Develop and employ any methods/tactics to help students build their confidence. Students often silently “beat themselves up.” What can be done to minimize this and help them see their progress?
  - A mid-term survey asked students if “only weak students need tutoring help?” – Students said that is not the case. How can DTs minimize the fear factor in asking for help?

- Help students ask questions – the full range: what’s this assignment about? How do I write a good topic sentence? How can I support what I am claiming here? How do I find a good source to support my paragraph? What should I get from reading this particular section of text?

- DTs can help students “unpack” an assignment. Students need the assignment and its particulars explained more than once.
  - Instructor-DT communication is critical to making this program effective.
- Somehow (?) reduce the “no-shows” when an appointment has been made with the DT, so that students get the outside help
- It is very important that the DT take the assignment and do a rough draft of at least one body paragraph so that the DT is very familiar with the assignment; this work can also be used in a tutoring session to help show process to the student; it also helps in communicating with the instructor any issues with the assignment that need to be addressed for the class as a whole (re: Milgram assignment/ultimate body paragraphs)