

---

# Proposal to Study the Feasibility of Implementing Stretch Composition at CSULA

January 2010

Prepared by the CSULA Composition Committee

Benjamin Bateman

Laura Garrett

Christopher Harris, Chair

Jorge Ribiero

Bidhan Roy

Lise Buranen, Director, University Writing Center (ex officio)

Jim Garrett, Composition Coordinator (ex officio)

## Abstract

This proposal outlines a pilot study that the department will begin in Fall 2010. The pilot will examine the effectiveness of stretch composition courses when compared to our existing independent composition courses. This study of stretch composition will require at least two years to complete.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	1
Stretch Composition.....	2
Stretch Course Design.....	6
Assessment Within Stretch Sequences .....	8
ENGL 100 Support .....	8
Projected Program Costs.....	9
Assessment of Pilot.....	10
Pilot Timeline.....	11

## Stretch Composition

Our current composition program is built around a sequence of well-articulated composition courses. Students are placed into their first-term writing class based on their score on the English Placement Test (EPT), unless they are exempt from the test, in which case they are placed directly into ENGL 101. Table 1 shows the typical distribution at CSULA of first-time students placed into their first writing course.

**Table 1: Typical Distribution of First-Time Freshmen at CSULA**

<b>Placed in</b>	<b>EPT Total Score</b>	<b>Pct of First-time Freshmen (FTF) Cohort Placed in this Course</b>
ENGL 101	151 or higher (or exempt from EPT)	24%
ENGL 101 with ENGL 100 tutorial	146-150	17%
ENGL 096	137-145	33%
ENGL 095	120-136	26%

A recent assessment of the developmental writing program at CSULA found that incoming first-year students were effectively placed in their first composition course, successfully prepared for ENGL 101, and ultimately retained at a higher rate than non-developmental students. This model of pre-collegiate independent writing courses preparing students for the next course (pre-collegiate or collegiate) in the sequence hides the actual goal of any developmental writing sequence: to prepare students to succeed in ENGL 101.

In theory, we should have only one course and one set of learning objectives: those of ENGL 101. In practice we have three sequential courses, three sets of learning objectives, three assessments. While our assessment data suggest we have been relatively successful at defining the imaginary “break points” between ENGL 095, ENGL 096, and ENGL 101, no such break points exist. Students in ENGL 095, 096 and 101 are all asked to read “college-level” texts and write “college-level” essays. The courses share the same types of learning outcomes and assignments but increase in depth and difficulty through the sequence of courses. The extent of the texts, the expectations about the level and type of engagement, the difficulty of the task, the expectations about fluency and correctness increase from course to course, but the kind and number of reading and writing asked of students do not because writing is best learned recursively. In many respects, we already have in place the rudiments of a stretch composition program because our courses progress in a well-articulated sequence.

### What Is Stretch Composition?

While non-specialists might not be familiar with the term, stretch composition is nearly two decades old. First implemented in the early 1990s at Arizona State University, stretch composition is based on a few simple principles:

- Independent developmental courses imply well-defined points that separate one writing course in a sequence from another. This assumption, drawn from other disciplines such as developmental mathematics, does not take into account what the research shows—that writing and language competence develops recursively, not linearly and incrementally.
- Students can be offered different paths to the same end-point. Some paths might involve a single course, others more than one course.
- The most important determinant of the effectiveness of writing instruction is time. Some students need more time to attain basic competency; others can achieve basic competency in less time.

A stretch composition course takes the “content” of ENGL 101 and “stretches” it over two or three quarters of instruction. The “content” of ENGL 101, of course, is not so much a thing or even a skill—it is a complex intellectual, social, and cultural activity best developed in communities over time.

The basic outline of the stretch model might be summarized as follows:

**Time:** Students do better with their writing coursework and feel better about their learning experience when given more time to write, revise, and discuss writing, especially when that experience takes place with a familiar cohort and instructor.

**Cohorts:** Cohort models, where students stay with the same instructor and same students, lead to effective learning (and writing) communities and allow the instructor to determine pacing and even curriculum appropriate to a specific cohort of students.

**College Credit:** College-level work should be rewarded with college-level credit. Since both the stretch version and the un-stretched version of ENGL 101 achieve the same learning objectives, stretch courses should be credit-bearing.

Research from the last decade conclusively supports the effectiveness of the stretch model. Programs that have adopted stretch models have seen a conclusive rise in student retention, pass rates, and performance. These benefits probably derive from these effects of stretch programs:

- Because stretch programs are “college-level,” students are no longer stigmatized as “remedial.”
- Because stretch programs use cohorts, student engagement increases.
- Because stretch programs keep students and instructors together, classes are able to build on content and skills from prior quarters and achieve nearly seamless curricular alignment.
- Because stretch programs remove the label of “remediation” from student transcripts, students look better to prospective employers and graduate programs, and the institution looks better to accrediting agencies.

- Because the stretched nature of the courses effectively teaches writing and revision as a task to be completed over time, students perform better on writing tasks in their majors.

Stretch composition programs offer multiple pathways for students to complete a university's first-year writing requirement. At CSULA, all entering first-year students must complete ENGL 101 to satisfy the "written communications" requirement of general education. Some students, though, would benefit from more time and more instruction and thus should be placed in a "stretch" version of ENGL 101, where the "content" of ENGL 101 is "stretched" over two or even three quarters. Stretch programs have been very successful nationwide. Several campuses in the CSU offer stretch composition, and this year alone at least three campuses (Los Angeles, Northridge, and Pomona) are considering piloting or implementing stretch courses.

### Design of the Pilot

For the purposes of implementing a pilot, we intend to use the existing course designators of the developmental writing program. Eventually, though, if the data support our belief in the efficacy of stretch composition, we will propose that the pre-baccalaureate writing courses that presently make up our developmental writing program be replaced with 100-level stretch composition courses.

To move our existing pre-baccalaureate courses to 100-level courses will require re-numbering of all composition courses. For the purposes of this proposal, the following course numbering scheme has been adopted. (FYC stands for First-Year Composition)

**ENGL 110ABC:** Stretch Composition (30-week FYC)

**ENGL 112AB:** Accelerated Stretch Composition (20-week FYC)

**ENGL 120:** Composition I (10-week FYC—currently numbered 101)

**ENGL 130:** Composition II (currently numbered 102)

The actual course numbers will of course be determined later. For the stretch courses listed above (ENGL 110ABC and ENGL 112AB), new curricula will need to be developed. These new curricula will be developed prior to and tested and refined during the pilot and used to develop the necessary new course proposals. ENGL 120 and 130 will only require course modifications to be renumbered. Changes to the General Education requirements will also be required so that CSULA GE Written Communication can be met by successful completion of ENGL 110C, ENGL 112B, or ENGL 120 (the current ENGL 101). The change to GE is summarized below.

<b>Current</b>	<b>Proposed</b>
Basic Skills	Basic Skills
A1 Written Communications	A1 Written Communications
ENGL 101	ENGL 110C
	ENGL 112B
	ENGL 120 (formerly ENGL 101)

In a full implementation of stretch composition, students would be placed in one of three paths to complete their CSU GE written communication requirement:

ENGL 110ABC—a 30-week course (three quarters)

ENGL 112AB—a 20-week course (two quarters)

ENGL 120—a 10-week course (one quarter)

To facilitate scheduling and promote cohorting, the 30-week courses would be offered in the same scheduling block all three quarters, and the 20-week courses would be offered in the same scheduling block for two quarters. For the pilot we would use our existing course numbers, though the content of the pilot stretch courses would, of course, be different. Listed below are the pilot courses and their course number “equivalents”:

<b>Pilot Course</b>	<b>Course Number Equivalent</b>
ENGL 110A	ENGL 095
ENGL 110B	ENGL 096
ENGL 110C	ENGL 101
ENGL 112A	ENGL 096
ENGL 112B	ENGL 101
ENGL 120	ENGL 101

*Note: During the pilot, courses identified in the schedule as ENGL 096 might be actual ENGL 096 sections, or they might be the second term of the 30-week stretch course (ENGL 110B) or the first term of the 20-week stretch course (ENGL 112A).*

The pilot of ENGL 110ABC (Stretch Composition) will require the following resources:

1. Six sections of ENGL 095 in Fall 2010 to be used as ENGL 110A
2. Six sections of ENGL 096 in Winter 2011 to be used as ENGL 110B
3. Six sections of ENGL 101 in Spring 2011 to be used as ENGL 110C
4. At least three instructors with each teaching no more than two cohorts in FWS 2010-2011

The pilot of ENGL 112AB (Accelerated Stretch Composition) will require the following resources:

1. Eight sections of ENGL 096 in Fall 2010 to be used as ENGL 112A
2. Eight sections of ENGL 101 in Winter 2011 to be used as ENGL 112B
3. At least four instructors with each teaching no more two cohorts in FW 2010-2011

Sections of ENGL 110ABC and ENGL 112AB would be capped at 19. The distribution of students involved in the pilot is shown in Table 2.

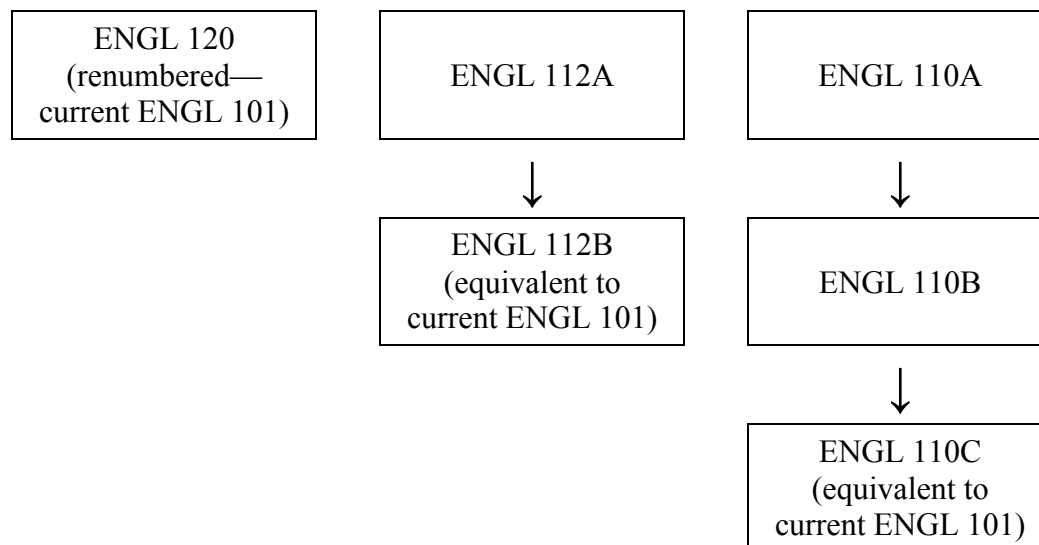
**Table 2: Distribution of Students in Pilot Courses**

	Fall	Winter	Spring
Students in ENGL 095/110A	114	0	0
Students in ENGL 096/110B	0	114	0
Students in ENGL 101/110C	0	0	114
Students in ENGL 096/112A	152	0	0
Students in ENGL 101/112B	0	152	
Total Number of Students in Pilot	266	266	114

## Stretch Course Design

Three paths will be available to satisfy the university’s general education written communication requirement.

**Figure 1: Paths to Completing GE Written Communications**



ENGL 110C and ENGL 112B will share learning objectives and expected competencies with ENGL 101. There will likely be differences between ENGL 110C, ENGL 112B and ENGL 120 (ENGL 101) in terms of their specific course outlines, pacing, and pedagogic strategies.

The shared learning objectives for ENGL 110C, ENGL 112B, and ENGL 120 (ENGL 101) will be based on the published learning outcomes developed by the Council of Writing Program Administrators. The WPA Outcomes are reproduced below.

### **Rhetorical Knowledge**

By the end of first year composition, students should

- Focus on a purpose
- Respond to the needs of different audiences
- Respond appropriately to different kinds of rhetorical situations
- Use conventions of format and structure appropriate to the rhetorical situation
- Adopt appropriate voice, tone, and level of formality
- Understand how genres shape reading and writing
- Write in several genres

### **Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing**

By the end of first year composition, students should

- Use writing and reading for inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating
- Understand a writing assignment as a series of tasks, including finding, evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing appropriate primary and secondary sources
- Integrate their own ideas with those of others
- Understand the relationships among language, knowledge, and power

### **Processes**

By the end of first year composition, students should

- Be aware that it usually takes multiple drafts to create and complete a successful text
- Develop flexible strategies for generating, revising, editing, and proof-reading
- Understand writing as an open process that permits writers to use later invention and re-thinking to revise their work
- Understand the collaborative and social aspects of writing processes
- Learn to critique their own and others' works
- Learn to balance the advantages of relying on others with the responsibility of doing their part
- Use a variety of technologies to address a range of audiences

### **Knowledge of Conventions**

By the end of first year composition, students should

- Learn common formats for different kinds of texts
- Develop knowledge of genre conventions ranging from structure and paragraphing to tone and mechanics
- Practice appropriate means of documenting their work
- Control such surface features as syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

The course sequences ENGL 110ABC and ENGL 112AB must eventually achieve these learning objectives.

### **Assessment Within Stretch Sequences**

Students in ENGL 110A, ENGL 110B, and ENGL 112A will be evaluated at the end of the quarter through a holistic assessment of a portfolio of their work. Using a six-point scoring guide, two readers will read and score each student portfolio. Scores that differ by two or more points will be read by a third reader. Split scores will be left as splits (i.e. a portfolio given a 3 by one reader and a 4 by another reader will be assigned a total score of 7).

For the purposes of the pilot, the portfolio assessment will be used for two purposes:

- To provide students with a clear indication of their progress
- To identify students in need of additional support

Students whose portfolio receives a score of 7 or less will be required to enroll in a one-unit tutorial workshop, as follows:

- Students moving from ENGL 110A to ENGL 110B will be required to enroll in special sections of ENGL 100 designed specifically for this population of students. (A new course number or other designation might be necessary to distinguish these sections from conventional ENGL 100 sections.)
- Students moving from ENGL 110B to ENGL 110C and students moving from ENGL 112A to ENGL 112B will be required to enroll in ENGL 100.

### **ENGL 100 Support**

Key to this pilot and the envisioned implementation of stretch composition is ENGL 100, the one-unit tutorial workshop offered through the University Writing Center. Currently, students who narrowly miss the 151 cut-off for ENGL 101 are placed directly in ENGL 101 but required to enroll concurrently in ENGL 100. The success of this program has already been amply documented in the 2009

Report on Placement and Retention. This pilot anticipates making further use of the ENGL 100 model.

As described in the previous section, ENGL 100-type workshops have been added as support for students moving through the ENGL 110ABC and ENGL 112AB sequences. Currently, ENGL 100 is offered only for students who score between 146 and 150 on the EPT. In the pilot, ENGL 100 will be offered to stretch students identified through the end-of-quarter assessment as needing additional support. The role of ENGL 100 in the new stretch composition model can be summarized as

- Available to all incoming students (Fall term) placed in ENGL 120 (ENGL 101) as their first composition course (and possibly required of some based on EPT)
- Available to all students (Winter term) moving from ENGL 112A to ENGL 112B (and possibly required of some based on portfolio assessment)
- Available to all students (Spring term) moving from ENGL 110B to ENGL 110C (and possibly required of some based on portfolio assessment)

## Projected Program Costs

For the pilot of stretch composition we will assume that students placed in ENGL 110ABC would normally have been placed in ENGL 095/096/101 and that students placed in ENGL 112AB would normally have been placed in ENGL 096/101. While the enrollment limit for ENGL 110AB and ENGL 112A will be 19 or the same as the current enrollment limit for ENGL 095/096, the enrollment limit for ENGL 110C and ENGL 112B will also be 19, which is less than the current enrollment limit for ENGL 101. The total projected cost of staffing the pilot courses is \$132,192. The cost of providing these same students with coursework using our current composition sequence would be \$116,640. The difference is due to the difference in class size between ENGL 110C/112B and ENGL 120.

It is expected that these increases will be offset in the eventual full implementation of stretch composition by adjusted placement ranges and improved student retention. A one-point adjustment in a placement range increases or decreases the cost of providing first-year composition coursework by nearly 5%. If the ENGL 110 placement range was set at 120-134 and the ENGL 112 range set at 135-144, the cost of full implementation of stretch would be lower than the cost of our current program. In addition, we expect that the university would realize significant cost savings through improved student retention, and that better preparation would improve graduation rates and lessen the time to degree.

The pilot will also call for increased ENGL 100 support. An additional 30-50 sections of ENGL 100 might be required each year.

## Assessment of Pilot

The pilot will be assessed using the following measures:

- In the Fall term, a comparison of the ENGL 110A “pass rate” with that of ENGL 095, and the ENGL 112A “pass rate” with that of ENGL 096
- In the Winter term, a comparison of ENGL 110B “pass rate” with that of ENGL 096
- Comparison of portfolios produced by students in ENGL 110C, ENGL 112B, with portfolios provided by selected sections of ENGL 120 (ENGL 101 does not generally require portfolios, so some sections will need to be designated as “control” sections and asked to provide portfolios similar to those required in ENGL 110C and ENGL 112B.)
- Comparison of grades in ENGL 110C, ENGL 112B, and ENGL 120 (ENGL 101)—this comparison will compare pilot participants to non-pilot students as well as to prior-year students (data drawn from 2009 Report on Placement and Retention)
- Comparison of 1-year and 2-year retention rates for various sub-populations—this comparison will compare pilot participants to non-pilot students as well as to prior-year data (data drawn from 2009 Report on Placement and Retention)
- Comments of portfolio readers—at the conclusion of the portfolio assessments, readers will be asked to comment at some length on the quality of student portfolios and the issues that might need to be addressed
- Student surveys—surveys will be used to measure students’ attitudes towards writing and their ability to self-assess; surveys will also measure students’ attitudes towards coursework and confidence in their readiness for subsequent coursework
- Student interviews—students will be selected at random and interviewed; responses of pilot participants will be compared to those of non-pilot participants
- Instructor interviews—instructors will be interviewed; responses of pilot participants will be compared to those of non-pilot participants

Ongoing progress reports on the pilot will be issued as data become available. The first report of substance will be available during Summer 2011, with a follow-up report available during Summer 2012. Because 2-year retention rates will not be available until the middle of the Fall 2012 term, the final report on the pilot will not be available until January 2013.

## Pilot Timeline

Preparatory	April 2009	Collect data on placement and retention and study relation between student placement and short- and long-term success
<i>report</i>	September 2009	Composition at CSULA: A Report on Placement and Retention
<i>report</i>	January 15, 2010	Complete proposal for Fall 2010 pilot of Stretch Composition (this document) and submit to department
	February 26, 2010	Receive departmental approval to proceed with pilot for Fall 2010
	March 2010	Receive other approvals (as necessary) to proceed with pilot for Fall 2010
	April 2010	Begin recruiting instructors to help design and teach pilot courses (ENGL 110ABC and ENGL 112AB)
	June 2010	Create detailed course outlines, recommended readings, sample assignments and other instructional materials for stretch courses (ENGL 110ABC and ENGL 112AB)
	Summer 2010	Work closely with Registrar, The Office of Undergraduate Studies, and department advisement staff to identify and place students in Stretch pilot
	September 15, 2010	Finalize course plans for stretch courses (ENGL 110ABC and ENGL 112AB) Create detailed pilot calendar for 2010-2011 (meeting schedule with pilot instructors)
1 <sup>st</sup> Year	September 2010	Begin pilot
	September 2010 (1 <sup>st</sup> week)	Conduct student attitudinal surveys of pilot participants and sample of non-pilot population (pre-survey)
	December 2010 (10 <sup>th</sup> week)	Conduct student attitudinal surveys of pilot participants and sample of non-pilot population (post-survey)
	December 2010 (Exam week)	Conduct portfolio assessments (ENGL 110A and ENGL 112A); interview readers
	January 2011 (2 <sup>nd</sup> week)	Conduct instructor and student interviews (on-going)
	March 2011 (10 <sup>th</sup> week)	Conduct student attitudinal surveys of pilot participants and sample of non-pilot population (post-survey)
	March 2011 (Exam week)	Conduct portfolio assessments (ENGL 110B and ENGL 112B); interview readers

## Piloting Stretch Composition

---

	April 2011 (2 <sup>nd</sup> week)	Conduct instructor and student interviews (on-going)
	May/June 2011 (10 <sup>th</sup> week)	Conduct student attitudinal surveys of pilot participants and sample of non-pilot population (post-survey)
	June 2011 (Exam week)	Conduct portfolio assessment (ENGL 110C); interview readers
<i>report</i>	June 30, 2011	Submit progress report on pilot; recommend expansion, contraction, or suspension of pilot for Fall 2011
	Summer 2011	Work closely with Registrar, The Office of Undergraduate Studies, and department advisement staff to identify and place students in Stretch pilot
2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	September 2011 (1 <sup>st</sup> week)	Conduct student attitudinal surveys of pilot participants and sample of non-pilot population (pre-survey)
	December 2011 (10 <sup>th</sup> week)	Conduct student attitudinal surveys of pilot participants and sample of non-pilot population (post-survey)
	December 2011 (Exam week)	Conduct portfolio assessments (ENGL 110A and ENGL 112A); interview readers
<i>report</i>	January 2012	Submit Report on First Year of Pilot (with 1-year retention data and eventual ENGL 101 grade data)
	January 2012 (2 <sup>nd</sup> week)	Conduct instructor and student interviews (on-going)
	March 2012 (10 <sup>th</sup> week)	Conduct student attitudinal surveys of pilot participants and sample of non-pilot population (post-survey)
	March 2012 (Exam week)	Conduct portfolio assessments (ENGL 110B and ENGL 112B); interview readers
	April 2012 (2 <sup>nd</sup> week)	Conduct instructor and student interviews (on-going)
	May/June 2012 (10 <sup>th</sup> week)	Conduct student attitudinal surveys of pilot participants and sample of non-pilot population (post-survey)
	June 2012 (Exam week)	Conduct portfolio assessment (ENGL 110C); interview readers
<i>report</i>	June 30, 2012	Submit progress report on pilot; recommend expansion, contraction, or suspension of pilot for Fall 2012
3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	Fall 2012	Status unknown
<i>report</i>	January 2013	Submit Report on Pilot (with 1-year and 2-year retention data and eventual ENGL 101 grade data)