

Composition at CSULA: A Report on Placement and Retention

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Abstract

The Department of English at CSULA examined data on student retention for students who began their career between Spring 2005 and Winter 2007 (inclusive). The results are included in this report. The data examined included:

- One-year and two-year retention rates for various subpopulations
- Performance in ENGL 095, ENGL 096, and ENGL 101 and its relation to retention
- Relation between English Placement Test (EPT) results, the total and the three subscores (reading, composing, essay), and placement in a first-term writing course
- Relation between placement in developmental writing and performance in ENGL 101
- Relation between placement in a first-term writing course and two-year retention

An examination of the above data suggests the following:

- The EPT total score has been an effective placement tool.
 - Little correlation was found between the EPT subscores (reading, composing, essay) and measures of short- and long-term success.
 - Students at the bottom of placement ranges are at greater risk and would benefit from re-placement or academic support.
- Developmental writing courses are effectively preparing students for success in ENGL 101.
 - In general, grades earned in ENGL 101 by developmental students directly correlates to the amount of time spent in such courses.
 - Students enrolled in developmental writing courses are more likely to stay at the university than students not enrolled in such courses.
- ENGL 100, the one-unit tutorial required of students scoring 146-150 on the EPT and co-enrolled in ENGL 101, effectively helps “developmental” students bypass developmental writing courses. Furthermore, students enrolled in ENGL 100 are much more likely to stay at the university than all other students. These higher retention rates suggest that the writing communities formed by small classes translate into greater student engagement.

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A. Introduction

At the beginning of 2009, the Department of English at CSULA initiated a review of its developmental writing program (i.e. “remedial” writing courses). Several factors taken together suggested the need for a systematic review of the effect this program was having on students and whether its current configuration was best suited to achieving the desired program and institutional outcomes. These factors included:

- A 90% pass rate since Winter 2007 for ENGL 095, the lowest-level developmental composition course offered at CSULA
- An 89% pass rate since Winter 2007 for ENGL 096, the intermediate-level developmental composition course offered at CSULA
- No information on the effectiveness of ENGL 100, a one-unit adjunct tutorial course required for students who just miss placing directly into the GE Written Communications course (ENGL 101)
- The need for baseline data to enable study of the effectiveness of changes in the developmental writing program, such as
 - Learning Communities for selected developmental populations
 - Learning Communities for specific colleges/majors
 - Potential shift from “remediation” model to “stretch course” model
 - Potential shift from placement determined by EPT score to placement by other means including use of EPT subscores (especially the reading score) or directed self-placement (DSP)

The high pass rates in ENGL 095 and ENGL 096 can be interpreted in a variety of ways. For example, the current placement mechanism might be placing students too low. Some students currently placed in ENGL 095 might be placed just as effectively in ENGL 096, and some students currently placed in ENGL 096 might be just as effectively placed directly into ENGL 101. Such a downward shift of the placement criteria appeals to the extreme budget environment of 2009, and one of the initial impetuses for this study was to determine how low those placement criteria could be set, and even whether the lowest-level developmental writing course was necessary.

The findings of this study, however, disprove all of these assumptions. While the pass rates in ENGL 095 and ENGL 096 might be “high” (bearing in mind that “high” and “low” are relative terms based on no known standard), short-term and long-term measures of student performance suggest that the current placement mechanism effectively places developmental students, that these students are effectively “remediated,” and that this “remedial” population not only performs at levels comparable to the non-remedial population but is more likely to stay at the university.

B. Placement in Entry-Level Writing Courses

Successful completion of ENGL 101 satisfies the CSU GE Written Communications requirement. To enroll in ENGL 101, students must first demonstrate “college-ready” competency in English either by scoring above specific benchmarks on common college entrance exams (SAT, ACT, and so on) or by scoring 151 or higher on the English Placement Test (EPT).

The EPT assesses reading and composing skills through multiple-choice questions, and writing skills through a holistically-scored timed writing examination. The results of the three independent sections of the test (reading, composing, and essay) are each converted to a scaled score (between 120 and 180), and the three scores are then averaged to produce the student’s EPT score. How that score is used to place students is determined by the individual campuses. Table 1 lists how different campuses currently use the EPT for placement.

Table 1: Use of EPT by CSU Campuses

	Term Weight	Second Term FYW	First Term FYW	First Term FYW Plus Tutorial	One Term Developmental	Two Terms Developmental
CSULA Equivalent		ENGL 102	ENGL 101	ENGL 101/100	ENGL 096	ENGL 095
Bakersfield	0.33	155+		142-154	120-141	
Channel Islands	0.50	DSP	DSP	DSP	DSP	DSP
Chico	0.50		147+	120-146		
Dominguez Hills	0.50		151+		142-150	120-141
East Bay	0.33		151+	147-150	141-146	120-140 ¹
Fresno	0.50		151+	120-150		
Fullerton	0.50		151+	145-150 ²	133-144 ²	
Humboldt	0.50		151+	139-150	120-138	
Long Beach	0.50		151+ ³		120-150	
Los Angeles	0.33		151+	146-150	137-145	120-136
Monterey Bay	0.50		151+		120-150	
Northridge	0.50		151+		142-150	120-141
Pomona	0.33		151+		142-150	120-141
Sacramento	0.50		149+	147-148	142-146	120-141
San Bernardino	0.33		150+		140-149	120-139
San Diego	0.50		151+	146-150	Outsourced	
San Francisco	0.50		151+	142-150	120-141	
San Jose	0.50		149+		Outsourced	
San Luis Obispo	0.33		151+	146-150	120-145	
San Marcos	0.50		151+		120-150	
Sonoma	0.50		151+	148-150	142-147	120-141
Stanislaus	0.50		148+		120-147	

¹ Three term developmental writing sequence

² Mandatory Writing Center visits; 120-132 placed in multilingual comp

³ 147-150 placed in FYW if SAT/ACT scores above 540/23

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Historically, the EPT score of 151 has been significant. Initially this score was used as a “cut score” separating “proficient” students from “remedial” students, though the number itself only represented the 50th percentile at the time this decision was made and has never been correlated to any accepted idea of writing proficiency. As Table 1 above and Figure 1 below show, the 151 score has remained the de facto standard for the CSU system, though the introduction of Directed Self-Placement (DSP), mandatory adjunct or tutorial classes, and a subtle downward drift has resulted in some erosion of this systemwide “standard.”

Of the twenty campuses that use the EPT to place students in first-year writing courses, only six campuses (Dominguez Hills, Long Beach, Monterey Bay, Northridge, Pomona, and San Marcos) still use 151 as the dividing line between one and multiple terms of composition. Like several other campuses, CSULA places students near but below the 151 score directly in the GE Written Communications course (ENGL 101) but provides these students with additional academic support through a one-unit tutorial section called ENGL 100. To be eligible for the ENGL 101/ENGL 100 option students need to score between 146 and 150 (inclusive) on the EPT.

If a student scores between 137 and 145 (inclusive) on the EPT, that student is placed in ENGL 096, “Basic Writing II,” at CSULA. As Table 1 above and Figure 1 below show, most campuses that distinguish between different levels of developmental or basic writing (i.e. offer at least two developmental or basic writing courses) use a much higher score to separate the one-term developmental students (those placed in ENGL 096 at CSULA for example) from the two or more term developmental students (those placed in ENGL 095 at CSULA for example). Of the eight CSU campuses with two or more developmental writing courses, five divide the developmental population at 142 (142 or higher placed in one course, 141 or lower placed in two or more courses), one divides it at 141, one at 140, and CSULA divides it at 137. The result is dramatically different requirements on different campuses. For example, a student with an EPT score of 137 or 138 would be placed in ENGL 096 at CSULA, and so that student would require two quarters to complete his or her CSU GE written communication requirement (ENGL 096 followed by ENGL 101). That same student would require one year or more of coursework at 14 other CSU campuses.¹

Finally, at CSULA students who score 136 and below on the EPT are placed in ENGL 095, “Basic Writing I.” This group of students receives the most consistent treatment in the system. Of the seventeen campuses that enroll students with EPT scores in this range and use the EPT for placement, eleven, including CSULA, require one year of coursework to complete the CSU GE written communication

¹ To complete his or her CSU GE Written Communications requirement a student with an EPT score of 137 or 138 would require one year at East Bay, Fullerton, Humboldt, Long Beach, Monterey Bay, Pomona, San Bernardino, San Francisco, San Marcos, and Stanislaus, and more than one year at Dominguez Hills, Northridge, Sacramento, and Sonoma.

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requirement. Two campuses require less time, and four campuses require more time.²

Table 2 shows the typical distribution at CSULA of first-time students placed into their first writing course.

Table 2: Typical Distribution of First-Time Freshmen at CSULA

Placed in	EPT Total Score	Pct of First-time Freshmen (FTF) Cohort Placed in this Course
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%

Because the initial purpose of this study was to determine the effect of placement and academic support on retention, the data window focused primarily on first-time freshmen who started at CSULA between Spring quarter 2005 and Winter quarter 2007. Most of the tables and graphs focus on two cohorts: Fall 2005 first-time freshmen and Fall 2006 first-time freshmen. The actual placement distribution of these two cohorts is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Distribution of First-Time Freshmen at CSULA (Fall 2005 and Fall 2006)

Placed in	Fall 2005	Fall 2006
ENGL 101	287	343
ENGL 101 with ENGL 100 tutorial	238	236
ENGL 096	428	468
ENGL 095	314	379

² The 11 campuses that require one year of coursework are East Bay, Fullerton, Humboldt, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Monterey Bay, Pomona, San Bernardino, San Francisco, San Marcos, and Stanislaus. The two campuses that require less than one year are Bakersfield and San Luis Obispo (two quarters each). The four campuses that require more than one year are Dominguez Hills, Northridge, Sacramento, and Sonoma (three semesters each).

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In summary, CSULA is typical amongst CSU campuses in

- using the EPT to place students in first-year writing courses
- enrolling students who score slightly below the EPT “cut score” of 151 directly into the GE Written Communications course and offering them appropriate academic support (ENGL 100)
- offering a multi-term developmental writing sequence for students who score below the EPT “cut score”

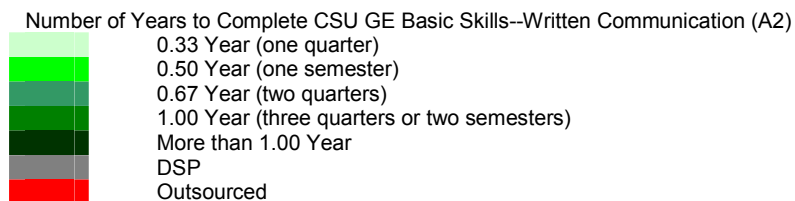
CSULA might be seen as not typical amongst CSU campuses in

- setting the “cut score” dividing its developmental writing population several points lower than other campuses with multi-term developmental writing sequences

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Figure 1: Number of Years Required to Complete CSU GE A2 Based on EPT Score

	Bakersfield	Channel Islands	Chico	Dominguez Hills	East Bay	Fresno (DSP?)	Fullerton	Humboldt	Long Beach	Los Angeles	Monterey Bay	Northridge	Pomona	Sacramento	San Bernardino	San Diego	San Francisco	San Jose	San Luis Obispo	San Marcos	Sonoma	Stanislaus
154	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
153	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
152	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
151	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
150	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
149	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
148	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
147	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
146	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
145	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
144	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
143	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
142	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
141	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
140	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
139	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
138	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
137	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
136	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
135	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
134	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
133	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
132	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
131	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
130	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
129	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
128	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
127	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
126	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
125	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
124	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
123	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
122	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
121	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
120	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33



C. Placement and Performance

Students who score below 151 on the EPT are placed in one of three tracks. Students with scores between 146 and 150 (inclusive) are placed directly into ENGL 101 and provided supplemental academic support through a mandatory one-unit tutorial (ENGL 100). Students with scores between 137 and 145 (inclusive) are placed in ENGL 096, which they must complete successfully before being eligible to enroll in ENGL 101. Students with scores between 120 and 136 (inclusive) are placed in ENGL 095, which they must complete successfully before being eligible to enroll in ENGL 096. They must complete ENGL 096 successfully before being eligible to enroll in ENGL 101.

Figure 2 shows the typical enrollment pattern followed by a cohort of Fall term enrollees.

Figure 2: Typical Enrollment Pattern Based on EPT Placement

	Fall Quarter	Winter Quarter	Spring Quarter
EPT 151 and higher or exempt	ENGL 101		
EPT 146-150	ENGL 101 and ENGL 100		
EPT 137-145	ENGL 096	ENGL 101	
EPT 120-136	ENGL 095	ENGL 096	ENGL 101

The purpose of the developmental writing courses (ENGL 095 and ENGL 096) is to prepare students to be successful in the GE Written Communications course (ENGL 101). The purpose of the supplemental tutorial course (ENGL 100) is to help students succeed in the GE Written Communications course. Ultimately, of course, the goal is larger, the aim of all writing courses being to help students succeed at the university. Given these goals, we can identify a short-term and long-term measure of the accuracy of EPT placement and the success of these curricular interventions. Student performance in ENGL 101 provides an appropriate short-term measure, and student two-year retention provides a long-term measure.³

EPT Placement and Success in ENGL 101

The EPT composite score (the EPT score produced by averaging student performance on the reading, composing, and essay sections of the exam) appears to place students accurately into the composition sequence at CSULA, and that

³ Ideally, other more discriminating measures of long-term performance (such as overall GPA, performance in upper division or GE course, and so on) would be included, but such data was not available for this study. Retention, however, provides a gross measure of student success.

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composition sequence effectively prepare students for ENGL 101. These claims are clearly supported by the data. Table 4 follows students placed in ENGL 095 in Fall 2005 through ENGL 096 and ENGL 101. Table 5 follows students placed in ENGL 096 in Fall 2005 and Fall 2006 through ENGL 101. Finally, Table 6 details how students placed directly into ENGL 101 performed in that class.

Table 4: ENGL 095 Student Performance in Subsequent Writing Courses (Fall 2005)

EPT Total	ENGL 095		ENGL 096		ENGL 101	
	Count	Pass %	Count	Pass %	Count	Avg Grade
121	1	100%	1	100%	1	3.30
122	0	0%	0	0%	0	0.00
123	2	50%	2	100%	2	2.65
124	10	80%	9	60%	6	2.62
125	5	100%	5	100%	5	2.28
126	8	63%	7	71%	5	3.06
127	9	67%	9	89%	9	1.78
128	26	88%	24	92%	22	2.92
129	20	85%	18	94%	16	2.51
130	25	88%	22	95%	23	2.69
131	25	88%	23	91%	21	2.80
132	25	92%	24	83%	20	3.26
133	38	82%	35	97%	35	2.77
134	48	92%	41	90%	36	2.34
135	35	86%	27	90%	23	3.04
136	37	89%	34	100%	32	3.37

Table 5: ENGL 096 Student Performance in Subsequent Writing Courses (Fall 2005/2006)

EPT Total	ENGL 096		ENGL 101	
	Count	Pass %	Count	Avg Grade
137	42	81%	37	2.32
138	38	89%	35	2.59
139	41	95%	38	2.37
140	46	96%	45	2.62
141	48	88%	41	2.46
142	46	98%	42	2.33
143	43	93%	37	2.44
144	49	86%	43	2.44
145	41	93%	37	3.02

Table 6: ENGL 101 Performance of Students Placed Directly into ENGL 101

EPT Total	ENGL 101	
	Count	Avg 101
Exempt	128	2.95
151 and up	159	2.95
146-150	205	2.70

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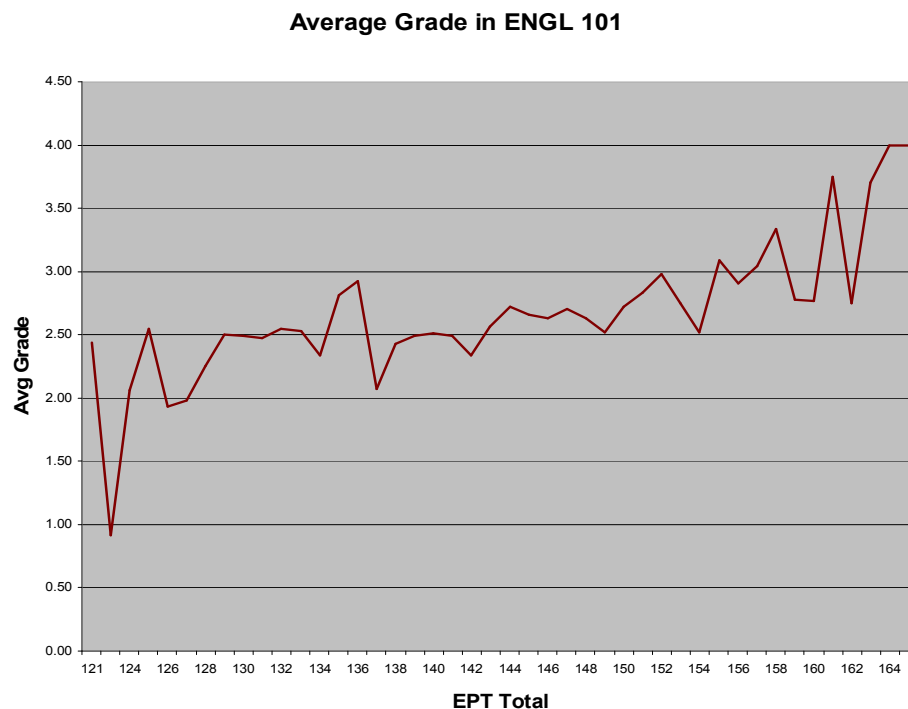
Table 4 suggests that students placed in ENGL 095 benefited from the additional time and instruction. The Fall 2005 cohort placed in ENGL 095 earned an average grade of 2.80 in ENGL 101, greater than the overall average grade for students in the course (2.66) and nearly as high as the average grade earned by students placed directly in the class (2.95).

Table 5 suggests that ENGL 096 students also benefited from additional time and instruction, though not to the extent enjoyed by students placed in ENGL 095. The ENGL 096 cohort earned an average grade of 2.51 in ENGL 101, certainly acceptable but significantly below all other populations. A review of additional data suggests that students who score below 140 on the EPT and are placed in ENGL 096 are less prepared to succeed in ENGL 101.

Finally, Table 6 suggests that students who score just below the 151 “cut score” but who receive additional academic support perform at levels consistent with the average and only slightly below students placed directly in ENGL 101. ENGL 101/100 students earned an average grade of 2.70 in ENGL 101, slightly greater than the average for the course (2.66), but less than the average earned by students placed directly in the class (2.95). The ENGL 101/100 cohort, however, dramatically outperforms all other cohorts in two-year retention, a subject discussed in the following section.

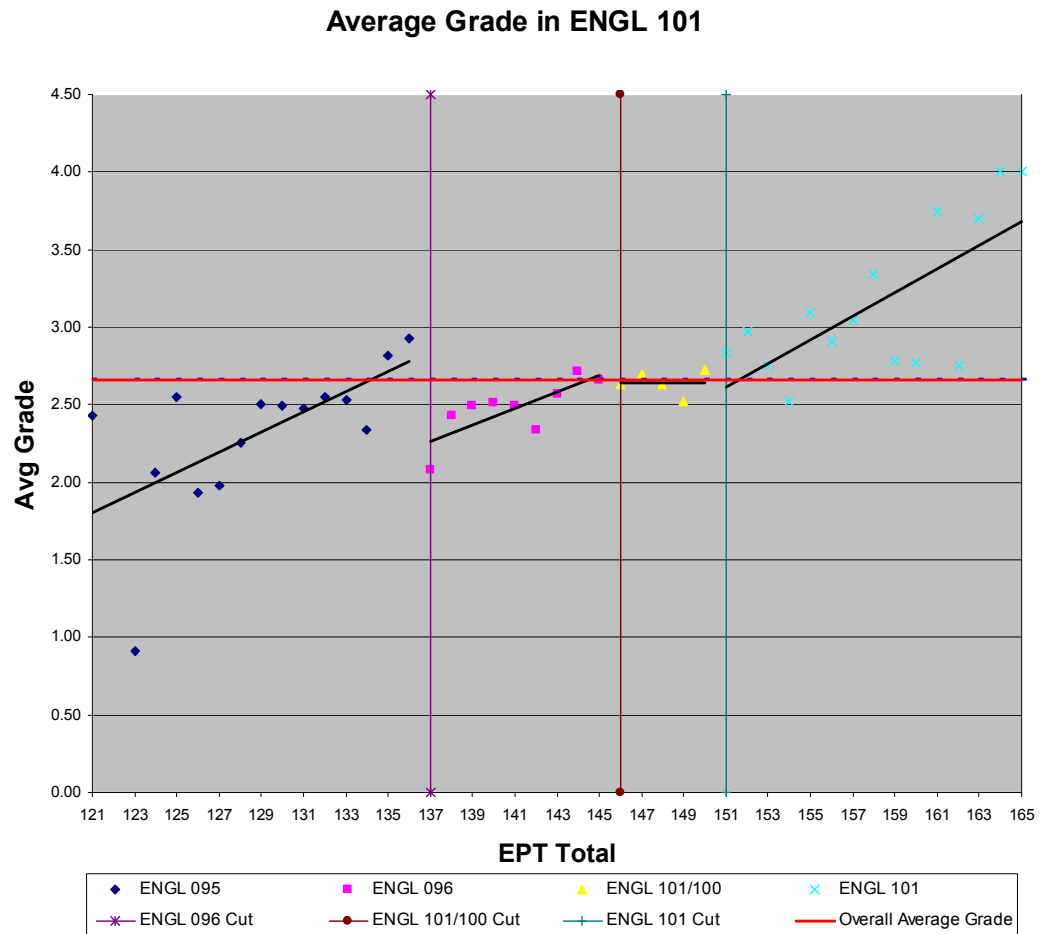
Figure 3 compares the grades earned in ENGL 101 to students’ EPT score. Initially, the graph seems to demonstrate only that on average students with higher EPT scores earn higher grades in ENGL 101, an unremarkable observation.

Figure 3: EPT Total Score Compared to ENGL 101 Grade



What Figure 3 hides are the discontinuities in the graph. A closer look reveals that the data fits a linear spline model, with the breakpoints or “knots” occurring exactly at the “cut scores” used to place students into the appropriate first-term writing course. Figure 4 shows the data divided into placement cohorts and re-plotted.

Figure 4: EPT Total Score Subdivided into Cohorts and Compared to ENGL 101 Grade



Given that the “cut scores” represent significantly different educational experiences, the “knots” in the spline model should occur at the “cut scores,” which they do. Each continuous line in Figure 4 (other than the line marking Overall Average Grade in ENGL 101) therefore represents a separate population of students: those who receive thirty weeks of instruction, those who receive twenty weeks of instruction, those who receive ten weeks of five-unit instruction, and those who receive ten weeks of four-unit instruction. The correlation between EPT score, the amount of instruction received and eventual performance in ENGL 101 could not be clearer.⁴

⁴ This clear correlation is only found in the EPT total score and is not present when only the reading score, the composing score, or the essay score is examined. In fact, a student’s reading

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This figure also makes strikingly clear the significant role played by developmental coursework in altering this direct relationship between EPT score and ENGL 101 grade. Students at the upper end of the ENGL 095 and ENGL 096 cohort, for example, earn grades comparable to students placed directly into ENGL 101, suggesting that their coursework in developmental writing classes has effectively prepared them for success in ENGL 101. Students in the middle range of both the ENGL 095 and ENGL 096 cohort earn grades near the average grade for the course (2.66) again suggesting that they have been prepared for success in ENGL 101.

Two areas of concern are visible in Figure 4, one of which can be dismissed easily. Students who score below 128 on the EPT would appear to be significantly at risk. This group (EPT score of 120-127) did not perform as well as other groups, earning an average 101 grade of 2.39. By comparison, students with EPT scores between 128 and 136 (inclusive) earned an average grade in ENGL 101 of 2.85, very close to the grade earned by those directly placed in the class (2.95) and better than the grade earned by ENGL 101/100 students (2.70). Students who score below 128 on the EPT, however, represent a small percentage of students, and so not enough data exists to determine any meaningful patterns. Of the 256 students (out of 314 who started in ENGL 095 in Fall 2005) who eventually took ENGL 101, only 28, or about 11% of the ENGL 095 cohort and 3% of the Fall 2005 cohort, scored below 128 on the EPT.

A second area of concern is less easily dismissed. As noted earlier, ENGL 095 students ultimately perform at levels comparable to students directly placed in ENGL 101. ENGL 096 students, however, are less successful in ENGL 101 than all other cohorts, including ENGL 095 students. The average ENGL 101 grades for the different placement cohorts are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Average Grade in ENGL 101 by Placement Cohort

Placement Cohort	Average Grade in ENGL 101	Difference from Overall Average Grade in ENGL 101 (2.66)
ENGL 095	2.80	5%
ENGL 096	2.51	-6%
ENGL 101/100	2.70	2%
ENGL 101	2.95	11%

score is the poorest predictor of success in ENGL 101. When grades earned in ENGL 101 are compared to the reading subscore on the EPT, students with lower EPT reading scores earn higher grades in ENGL 101 than students with higher scores within specific score ranges. For example, students with EPT reading scores below 127 earn higher average grades in ENGL 101 than students with EPT reading scores between 128 and 136. Students with EPT reading scores between 137 and 139 earn higher average grades in ENGL 101 than students with EPT reading scores between 140 and 144. EPT reading score correlates to ENGL 101 grade only for students scoring 150 or higher on the reading subsection.

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When data from Fall 2006 is combined with data from Fall 2005, a clearer picture emerges.

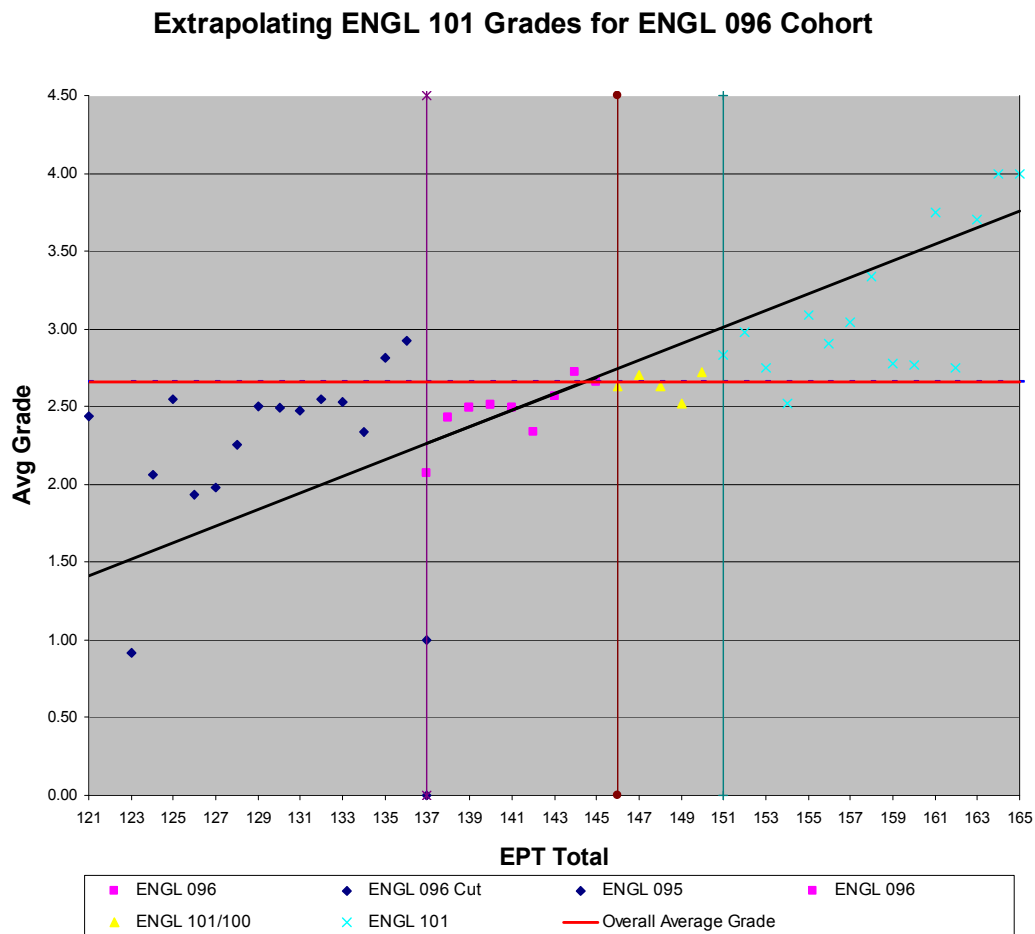
Table 8: Average Grade in ENGL 101 by ENGL 096 Subgroup

EPT Score	Average Grade in ENGL 101
137-138	2.46
137-141	2.53
142-145	2.73

The small subgroup at the bottom of the placement range (EPT 137-138) performs well below almost all other groups, barely even outperforming the ENGL 095 cohort with the lowest EPT scores (120-127). When the subgroup is expanded by moving the “cut score” to 142, the remaining ENGL 096 cohort (142-145) earns an average ENGL 101 grade of 2.73, above the course average (2.66), the ENGL 101/100 cohort (2.70) and approaching the ENGL 095 cohort (2.80).

The data above and that shown in Figure 4 suggest two possibilities: students at the high end of a placement range could potentially be moved up to the next placement group; or students at the low end of a placement range would benefit from being placed in a lower group. The first possibility sums up the general procedure of campuses in the CSU, a general and steady downward drift of “cut scores” to exclude more students from “remediation” and move developmental students faster through a composition sequence. Students at the high end of the ENGL 095 placement range have been highly successful in ENGL 101, slightly outperforming even those students deemed exempt from remediation. Such students would appear to be ideal candidates to be “jumped” to ENGL 096. As shown in Figure 5, however, such a move would have a considerable impact on those students.

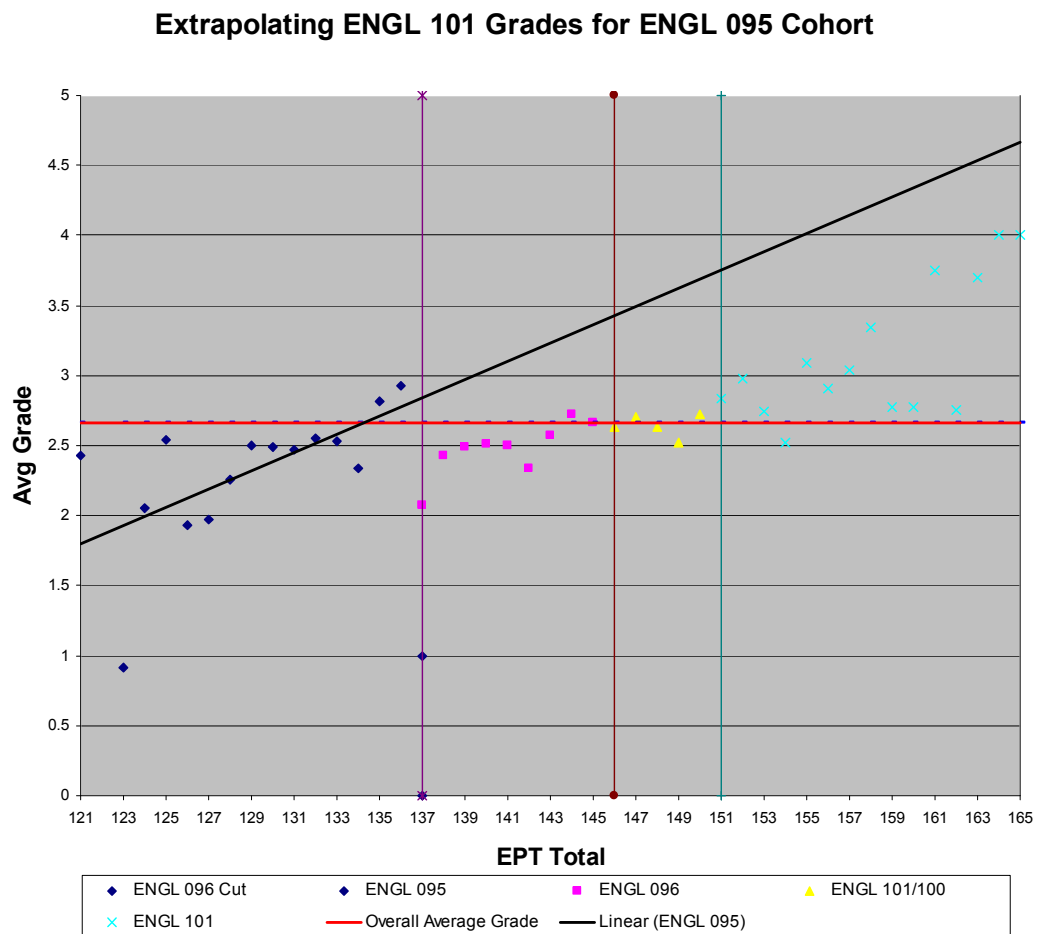
Figure 5: The Effect of Placing High EPT Score ENGL 095 Students in ENGL 096



The diagonal line in Figure 5 represents the relationship between EPT score and ENGL 101 grade extrapolated from the performance of students presently placed in ENGL 096. If students at the high end of the ENGL 095 placement range were placed instead in ENGL 096, their performance in ENGL 101 would suffer considerably. For example, students with an EPT score of 136 are currently placed in ENGL 095 and can be expected to earn an average grade of 2.93 in ENGL 101. Those same students placed directly into ENGL 096 would be expected to earn an average grade of 2.21 in ENGL 101, a decline of 25%.

The other possibility is self-evident: students at the bottom of the placement range for ENGL 096 would benefit from being placed in ENGL 095.

Figure 6: The Effect of Placing Low EPT Score ENGL 096 Students in ENGL 095



The diagonal line in Figure 6 represents the relationship between EPT score and ENGL 101 grade extrapolated from the performance of students presently placed in ENGL 095. If students at the low end of the ENGL 096 placement range were placed instead in ENGL 095, their performance in ENGL 101 would improve considerably. Table 9 lists the change in average ENGL 101 grade that might be expected if students at the low end of ENGL 096 were placed in ENGL 095.

Table 9: Average ENGL 101 Grades Projected for ENGL 096 Cohort Placed in ENGL 095

EPT Score	Avg Grade When Placed in ENGL 096	Avg Grade If Placed in ENGL 095	Pct Change
137	2.08	2.83	36%
138	2.43	2.90	19%
139	2.49	2.97	16%
140	2.50	3.03	21%

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What these two scenarios illustrate is that student needs exist on a linear scale but university coursework does not. At present a student scoring 136 on the EPT is placed in ENGL 095 and receives thirty weeks of instruction to complete his or her GE Written Communications requirement. A student scoring at 137 on the EPT is placed in ENGL 096 and receives twenty weeks of instruction to accomplish the same. The student scoring 136 might actually require less than thirty weeks, but certainly would be at great risk if he or she received only twenty weeks. The student scoring 137 undoubtedly requires more than twenty weeks, but the current budget climate virtually rules out the possibility of that student receiving more instruction. Furthermore, the problem, of course, is unrelated to whether the term is a quarter or a semester—it is rather a problem of terms themselves.

One possible solution is to expand the ENGL 100 model to include at risk populations in ENGL 096. An ENGL 100 course designed specifically to support the low-end of the ENGL 096 placement range might address this population of students (EPT 137-140). In addition, the ENGL 100 model might be extended beyond the Fall term population of ENGL 101 students (EPT 146-150) and used to support students moving from ENGL 096 in the Fall to ENGL 101 in the Winter. Likewise, ENGL 100 could be used to support students moving from ENGL 096 in the Winter (Fall term ENGL 095 students) to ENGL 101 in the Spring.

D. Composition and Retention

The data on retention is very straightforward. Students who perform well in ENGL 101, ENGL 096, and ENGL 095 are more likely to stay at the university. What is less obvious is that students who are placed in developmental writing are more likely to stay at the university than students who are placed directly into ENGL 101. The students most likely to be at the university after two years are students placed into ENGL 101/100.

**Table 10: Relation Between Placement/Performance and 2 Year Retention
(Fall 2005 and Fall 2006 Combined)**

Placement	Grade	Retained	Left CSULA	Pct
ENGL 101	A	85	27	76%
ENGL 101	A-	82	39	68%
ENGL 101	B+	72	34	68%
ENGL 101	B	81	36	69%
ENGL 101	B-	33	26	56%
ENGL 101	C+	11	10	52%
ENGL 101	C	10	22	31%
ENGL 101	NC	12	50	19%
Total for ENGL 101		386	244	61%

ENGL 101/100	A	30	10	75%
ENGL 101/100	A-	53	16	77%
ENGL 101/100	B+	49	16	75%
ENGL 101/100	B	80	25	76%
ENGL 101/100	B-	42	19	69%
ENGL 101/100	C+	27	15	64%
ENGL 101/100	C	31	18	63%
ENGL 101/100	NC	15	28	35%
Total for ENGL 101/100		327	147	69%

ENGL 096	CR	570	241	70%
ENGL 096	NC	22	63	26%
Total for ENGL 096		592	304	66%

ENGL 095	CR	411	196	68%
ENGL 095	NC	28	58	33%
Total for ENGL 095		439	254	63%

The two-year retention rate for students enrolled in any developmental writing program (ENGL 095, ENGL 096, ENGL 100) was higher than the university rate of 61.5%. Students placed into ENGL 095 were 3% more likely to stay, and 10% more likely to stay if they passed the course. ENGL 096 students were 7% more likely to stay and 14% more likely to stay if they passed. Students enrolled in ENGL 100 were 12% more likely to stay at the university, regardless of their performance in ENGL 101.

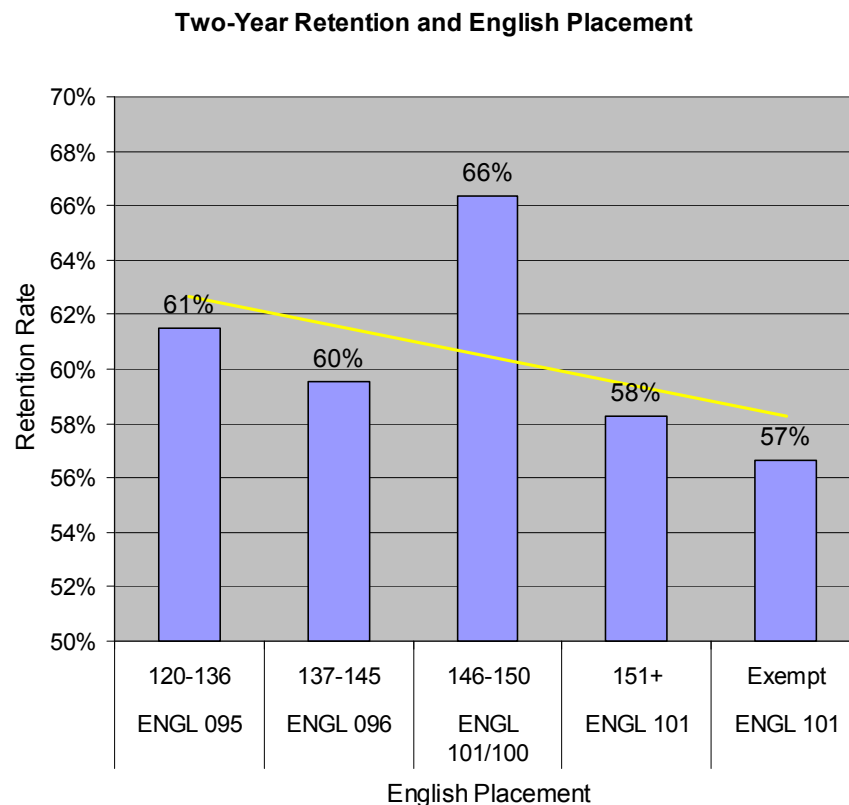
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Table 11 expands the totals to include all students who started at CSULA between Spring 2005 and Winter 2007 (inclusive). The two-year retention rates are calculated for each placement category and Figure 7 provides a visual representation of this data.

Table 11: Two-Year Retention and English Placement

Placement	EPT Total	2 Year Retention
ENGL 095	120-136	61.5%
ENGL 096	137-145	59.5%
ENGL 101/100	146-150	66.4%
ENGL 101	151+	58.3%
ENGL 101	Exempt	56.6%

**Figure 7: Two-Year Retention Related to English Placement
(Spring 2005 through Winter 2007)**



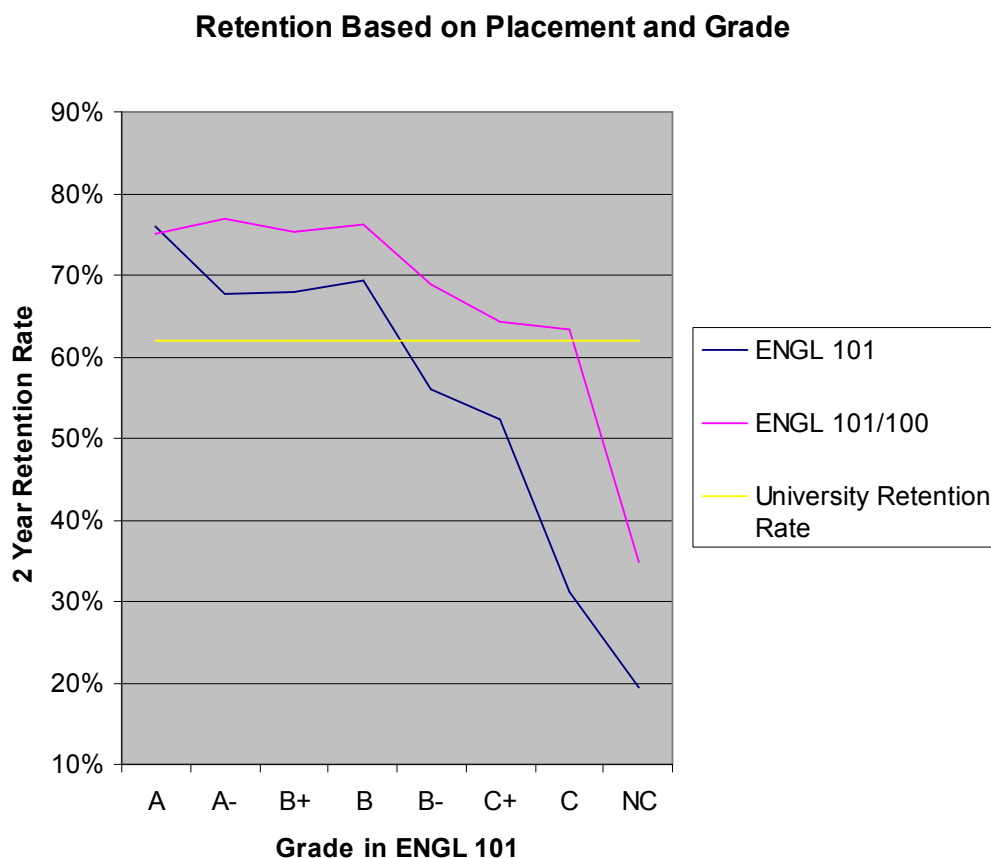
Two-year retention rates do not correlate to EPT score in any meaningful way until the EPT scores are grouped into the placement ranges used to place students into their first-term writing class. While EPT score does not correlate meaningfully to retention rate, placement groupings, and the different institutional

experiences they represent, do. The results are somewhat surprising. As Figure 7 illustrates, students required to take more writing classes are more likely to stay at the university than students who take fewer classes.

This finding, like the data on ENGL 101 grades discussed in the previous section, suggests that the developmental writing sequence at CSULA is effectively preparing students for success at the university. What is less clear, however, is why an ENGL 095 student is 8% more likely to stay than a student placed directly into ENGL 101. Certainly some possibilities include the smaller class size of developmental writing courses, which foster greater student engagement, as well as the connection between developmental writing courses and academic support services such as the University Writing Center.

Both the engagement possible in smaller classes and the direct connection to services such as the Writing Center might begin to explain the significantly higher retention rate for students who are placed into the ENGL 101/ENGL 100 class. Figure 8 is based on data listed earlier in Table 10.

Figure 8: Retention Rates for ENGL 101 and ENGL 100 Compared



As Figure 8 illustrates, students in ENGL 101/100 are more likely to stay at the university than ENGL 101 students regardless of the grade received in the course. In fact, while directly placed ENGL 101 students dip below the university

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retention rate when their grades dip below a B in the course, ENGL 101/100 students remain above the university average for all grades except NC.

ENGL 100 not only provides academic support enabling students who place below the “cut score” to succeed in ENGL 101, it also has an unmistakable though not clearly defined effect on retention. One explanation is greater student engagement. These one-unit tutorial classes, limited to 8-10 students, foster writing communities and connect directly to other Writing Center services. Those connections, personal, instructional, institutional, are perhaps key to the higher retention rates associated with not only ENGL 100 but with all three developmental writing courses at CSULA.

E. Conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn from these findings:

- Placement
 - The EPT total score can be an effective placement tool. The EPT subscores (reading, composing, essay) correlate less effectively with measures of short- and long-term success, with the reading subscore showing no correlation.
 - The placement ranges (EPT score ranges) used at CSULA are appropriate, though students with scores between 137 and 140 (inclusive) would probably be more appropriately placed in ENGL 095.
- Coursework
 - Developmental writing courses are effectively preparing students for success in ENGL 101.
 - Students placed in ENGL 095 eventually earn grades in ENGL 101 that are comparable to the grades earned by students placed directly into ENGL 101. Students placed in ENGL 096 eventually earn grades in ENGL 101 that are slightly below the average for the course. In general, these two findings suggest that grades earned in ENGL 101 directly correlates to time spent in developmental writing courses.
 - Students enrolled in developmental writing courses are more likely to stay at the university than students not enrolled in such courses.
 - ENGL 100, the one-unit tutorial workshop required of students scoring 146-150 on the EPT and co-enrolled in ENGL 101, effectively helps “developmental” students bypass developmental writing courses.
 - An ENGL 096-specific version of ENGL 100 might be required of students placed in ENGL 096 who score at the low-end of the placement range (137-140).
 - ENGL 100 might be extended beyond the Fall term population of ENGL 101 students (EPT 146-150) and used to support selected (based on EPT score) or all developmental students moving to ENGL 101 in the Winter and Spring terms.