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ABSTRACT

Surveys eliciting descriptive information on English programs were sent to the deans of instruction, department chairpersons, and faculty in 21 Alabama community colleges; 17 colleges provided institutional data, 19 of 19 department chairpersons returned the survey, and 80% of the English faculty responded. The survey requested information on: (1) average number of sections taught per full-time faculty member; (2) average number of preparations per full-time faculty member; (3) average faculty teaching load; (4) average student load per quarter; (5) average section size for composition, literature, "not separated," remedial reading, and remedial writing courses; (6) support facilities available to the department; (7) placement procedures; (8) remedial English programs and their emphases; (9) regular English programs, their content, and methods of instruction; (10) teacher evaluation of students and student evaluation of teachers; and (11) grade distributions and student retention. Areas of concern emerging from the study include a lack of a consistent pattern of placement, the narrow transfer-orientation of English programs, a lack of sufficient data on retention, and the inadequate training of English teachers who indicate that they have received no graduate level instruction in composition, in the teaching of composition, in the applications of grammar to composition, or in motivational factors in teaching non-verbal students. (AYC)

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## FRESHMAN ENGLISH PROGRAMS IN ALABAMA JUNIOR COLLEGES

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Darrel Clowes, Ph. D.

Report Number Two in the Auburn University Junior College

Leadership Program's Monograph Series

JC 790218

## FOREWORD

This study is the second in a series made possible by a grant from Auburn University's Research Grant-in-Aid Program. Dr. Darrel Clowes (now Assistant Dean, Miami-Dade Junior College) conducted the investigation and prepared this report. He was assisted by the staff and students in the Auburn University Junior College Leadership Program.

The limited scope of the study allows only for the definition of major problem areas and gross comparison with national trends in the teaching of English in the junior college. If this report serves to increase the curiosity of others about the subject and leads to further study, then the resources used were well-spent.

We are particularly grateful to Dr. Clowes and the numerous faculty members, department chairmen, and deans whose professional concern and commitment led them to the drudgery of completing yet another questionnaire.

E. B. Moore, Jr., Director  
Junior College Leadership Program

## FRESHMAN ENGLISH PROGRAMS IN ALABAMA'S JUNIOR COLLEGES

### BACKGROUND

The junior college movement has burgeoned since the end of World War II and now, in the early 1970's, has reached its first growth plateau. There is very little descriptive data and even less analytic data about the English programs in these rapidly expanding junior colleges. The Weingarten and Kroeger study entitled English in the Two-Year College (14) and its supporting documents by Archer and Farrell entitled Research in the Development of English Programs in the Junior College (2) were the first large scale efforts to describe English programs as they existed in 1965. A subsequent national study reflecting the state of the art in 1970 was conducted under the direction of Michael F. Shugrue. A report of the results has not been formally published but has appeared in article form entitled "The National Study of English in the Junior College".

The gradual development of data about English programs coincides with several significant events in the community junior college movement. The rapid growth in institutions and enrollment appears over; the 70's are apt to represent a growth plateau (11). Societal forces are acting upon the community junior colleges to force a rethinking of the priorities established during the expansionists years. Financial constraints, political pressures, and changing social values all exert an influence upon institutional priorities. And the conflict between a renewed "career education" thrust and the emerging "counter-culture" represents another unknown to be accommodated during the 1970's.

Alabama is uniquely in the position of reconstructing and redirecting its junior college program. The initial spurt of activity in establishing institutions and developing acceptance for the junior college has been accomplished. The task now is to arrive at a reasonable political, educational, financial, and rational accommodation with the existing technical institutes to combine the thrusts of the two forms of institutions into a meaningful and viable institution to serve Alabama's needs. The English program is a key component of the academic and of the vocational-technical program in Alabama's junior colleges for the '70's and 80's. Planning curricula and programs for the junior colleges will be a major task over the next few years and the English programs which must be an important segment of those curricula and programs must be looked at from both a national and a state perspective. Hopefully, this study will contribute some descriptive data and some insights about the state of English programs at this time, about the possible directions for English programs, and about desirable recommendations for the development of the English programs in Alabama's junior colleges.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to describe in quantitative terms the English programs in Alabama's two-year colleges so that informed statements can be made about the current nature of English programs in the junior colleges of Alabama and about the comparison of Alabama's current program with the existent descriptions of programs on a national level. This study should have significance in two areas. First, it adds to the knowledge of English programs in junior colleges throughout the nation since it joins a slowly emerging group of studies



regarding the English program in individual states. The national studies provide a baseline of data against which descriptions of state programs take on greater clarity and sharper perspective. Second, Freshman English Programs in Alabama's Junior Colleges can help provide useful data about what was in the past and what is today as well as an additional input for projections of what can be and what ought to be for future English programs.

This study has restricted itself to a descriptive survey of English programs in the state to provide concrete information that could provide a basis in fact for decision making about future English programs. Tentative interpretations are drawn when appropriate and are clearly labeled. This decision was made in awareness of three major problem areas facing the junior college on the national level. There is first widespread confusion/disagreement about the goals which the junior college should pursue. The junior college has adopted a wide spectrum of goals and is attempting to accomplish many tasks. Arthur Cohen has led the reaction to this diffusion of effort and is now suggesting that the community college and the junior college must restrict their goals (8, 9). The Chronicle of Higher Education and The Carnegie Commission Reports of the last two or three years have stressed the confusion among the various institutions of higher education about their specific goals and therefore about the means they would employ to accomplish their goals. The second major dilemma facing the junior college is the high rate of student attrition which seems almost endemic of the two year institution. Autry's recent study has borne out from national research data the impressions and results of local research indicating a very high level of attrition from the first to the second year of the junior

college and again a high level of attrition between the second year and graduation (3). This may be the result of institutional goal confusion as identified in the first instance or a result of the various strategies used within the junior colleges to accomplish their various missions. Although we cannot identify and clearly label the causes of attrition, it is quite apparent that the fact of high attrition signals some difficulties in the junior college programs. The third major problem emerging on the national scene is the pressing need for remedial programs or "repair" programs in the junior colleges and the general lack of research data for the evaluation of existing remedial programs. Here John Roueche's Salvage, Redirection or Custody clearly identifies the problem of remedial education, relates remedial education to the task of the community junior college, and points up the many steps needed to develop effective remedial programs (12).

#### Survey Population and Method

The population surveyed was all the junior colleges in Alabama as listed in the 1971 Junior College Directory (1). One college, Marion Institute, was deleted because it appears to be a unique institution whose military emphasis and selective admissions set it apart from the other institutions and therefore made it non-representative for the purposes of this study. One institution, James H. Faulkner State Junior College, declined to participate in the survey and one institution, George C. Wallace State Technical Junior College in Selma, was included in the survey as a junior college although it has not yet appeared in the Directory for 1971. Therefore, of the possible 23 junior colleges in the state of Alabama, 21 were actually involved in this survey. Of the 21 institutions included in whole or in part, 17 returned the forms supplied to their academic

deans which provided the basic institutional data reported in the study; this compares with 239 institutions providing institutional data in the Weingarten and Kroeger study. Of the 21 Alabama institutions surveyed, 19 had department chairmen for English and all 19 returned completed forms; this compared with 187 department chairmen who completed report forms for Weingarten and Kroeger. The number of English faculty who completed the Alabama questionnaire was 115 - approximately 80 percent of the English teachers in Alabama's junior colleges - as compared to 292 faculty members who completed the forms on the national survey by Weingarten and Kroeger. This study of Alabama's English programs, then, did not use a sampling technique but rather surveyed the entire population. Institutional data was gathered from 17 of the possible 21 institutions; departmental chairman information was gathered from 19 of the possible 21 institutions, and approximately 80 percent of the total faculty in the state participated in supplying faculty data. Therefore, a high degree of reliability may be accorded the responses to the survey instruments.

The survey data was gathered from questionnaires which were shortened forms of the instruments used in the Weingarten - Kroeger study which increases compatibility of data between the two surveys. Each Alabama institution surveyed was contacted by a professional member of the Junior College Leadership Program staff who discussed the survey and its rationale with the dean of instruction or the president of the institution and with the department chairman of the institution. In many instances it was convenient and seemed wise to discuss the survey with the individual faculty members; this was done in perhaps one half of the institutions visited. In general the level of cooperation

TEACHING LOAD

CHART I

ALABAMA STUDY

WEINGARTEN &  
KROEGER STUDY

	ALL CHAIRMEN	PUBLIC J.C.'S ONLY	PRIVATE J.C.'S ONLY	REPORTED BY CHAIRMEN	REPORTED BY FACULTY
1. Average # sections/full-time faculty member	3.5	3.2	5.0	n/a	n/a
2. Average # preparations/full-time faculty member	2.1	2.0	3.0	n/a	2.6
3. Average faculty teaching load in quarter hours	15.9	16.1	15.0	13.1*	n/a
4. Average student load/quarter	106	101	142	n/a	120.5*
5. Average section size for					
Composition	27.5	27.6	28.5	28.2	n/a
Literature	30.3	30.2	31.0	33.7	n/a
Not separated	26.	26.	-	n/a	n/a
Remedial Reading	25.1	24.5	30.0	23.0	n/a
Remedial Writing	23.8	23.8	-	25.1	n/a

\* Semester - not quarter

of the scores used to produce an average figure will be noted in the test whenever it is available and might possibly be a factor. The limitation of this procedure is that the Weingarten and Kroeger study and the Shugrue study do not consistently report range.

#### Average Number of Sections per Full-Time Faculty Member

In the Alabama study, 17 chairmen reported an average of 3.5 sections per full-time faculty member. The most commonly reported number of sections was 3 while the range was from 2 to 5 sections. There is no way to compare this with the data gathered in the other two studies since here the difference between semester and quarter hours does obscure the realities.

#### Average Number of Preparations per Full-Time Faculty Member

Alabama's English chairmen reported that the average number of preparations required was 2.1 preparations/full-time faculty member. This result is consistent with the N.C.T.E. recommendation of no more than 2 preparations per quarter or semester and appears to be an improvement over the 2.6 figure reported by the Weingarten and Kroeger studies. In Alabama the spread was from 2 to 4 preparations with 2 preparations being most frequent. It is very possible that this low number of preparations per faculty member and relatively high average number of sections taught per faculty member (3.5) reflects a curriculum leanness in Alabama. There are relatively few courses offered by the English departments which do not fit the normal 101, 102 and 201, 202 sequence. In states with more established colleges and English programs, it is common to encounter a wide range of courses meeting a wide range of student needs while in

Alabama we have tended to concentrate on the traditional transfer-oriented programs and upon a fairly monolithic curriculum geared to the transfer student.

#### Average Faculty Teaching Load Expressed in Quarter Hours

In the Alabama study the average faculty teaching load was 15.9 quarter hours with a range from 15 to 20. This compares with 13.1 semester hours reported by chairmen surveyed in the Weingarten and Kroeger studies and thus suggests that the faculty teaching load in Alabama is slightly higher than the national norm. Shugrue's study bears out this suggestion. Shugrue combined both quarter hours and semester hours in computing his figure and reports that of the faculties surveyed 51% say they have an average weekly teaching load in excess of 12 hours; in the Alabama study the chairmen surveyed reported that 100% of the instructors had a weekly teaching load in excess of 12 hours. When Shugrue surveyed instructors concerning their teaching load he reported that 33% of the instructors claimed a teaching load of 12 hours or less a week; 57% reported a teaching load from 13 to 15 hours per week, and 6% reported a teaching load in excess of 16 hours per week. This compares with the data reported by Alabama chairmen who indicate that 13 of the 16 institutions reporting (81%) have an average faculty teaching load of 15 hours per week, and 2 have an average teaching load of 17.5 hours per week. The obvious fallacy involved here is that while no one individual teaches 3.5 sections and the distribution between composition and literature varies by semester it does appear that Alabama English faculties are facing slightly lower student loads than were reported in the 1965

national studies, which is consistent with the national trend towards lowering the student load indicated by Shugrue.

#### Average Section Size for Various Components of the English Program

The material presented in Chart I is fairly self-evident for each of the components described. Only a few comments appear to be in order. The range of composition section sizes was from 20 to 35 with the great majority clustering within the 25 to 30 range. The range for literature courses was from 18 to 40 with an extreme concentration in the area from 30 to 35. In both of these instances Alabama's English teachers appear to be facing smaller sections than were reported in the 1965 survey. There is no way to affirm a trend, but the direction of change from the Weingarten - Kroeger study to the Shugrue study makes it reasonable to assume that section sizes in English are declining nationally and that Alabama reflects this pattern.

In the remedial area two items appear significant. First, there are 13 programs reported by the 17 reporting chairmen. This in itself is significant when compared with the paucity of remedial programs reported by Weingarten and Kroeger and with the lament Shugrue presented in describing the lack of effort and time devoted to remedial work in the junior colleges which he surveyed. Shugrue indicated that only 54% of the colleges reporting were devoting as much as 30% of their departmental time to the non-transfer and remedial programs. The class sizes reported for these remedial programs, however, are surprisingly high. It is unclear what this indicates (7). Discussions with the various departmental chairmen have indicated a general dissatisfaction with the remedial programs existent in the state and some concern about their effectiveness. There

seem to be a large number of approaches used in remedial education with very few approaches producing sufficient success to warrant their being continued for more than one to two years on a trial basis. At the same time there has been virtually no research and little concerted effort on a statewide basis to bring any kind of expertise to bear upon the problems of remedial English education and therefore the diffusion of effort and uncertainty about results seem only to be expected. The research and cooperation needed to develop effective remedial programs are spelled out (4, 5, 6) and can be done. A strong commitment of money and talent are needed - possibly by the state itself rather than by any one institution.

Support Facilities Available to the Department  
as reported by Department Chairmen

In general the chairmen of the English departments in Alabama report a high level of satisfaction with the space, personnel and media available to assist them in their instructional tasks. Adequate office and classroom space was reported by 81% of the chairmen, adequate secretarial help by 77%, and adequate media support by 75% or more of the department chairmen. The weakest areas reported were those that would encourage utilization of alternative modes of instruction. Specifically, only 23.5% reported satisfaction with the media technician supplied while 76.5% reported dissatisfaction. This is obviously an area where the institutions within the state provide very limited support to efforts to individualize instruction through media. An additional area of neglect appears to be the use of theme graders. Theme graders have an established place within English departments as paraprofessional assistants.

This assistance appears to be untapped in the state with 100% of the chairmen reporting no theme graders available for the department's use. The availability of media is generally viewed favorably with the exception of equipment to provide for photographic production or the reproduction of slides. Again, this would be a necessary ingredient in the development of individualized instruction and reflects a general neglect in this area.

### PLACEMENT

Placement examinations were used in 14 of the 18 institutions whose chairmen responded to this section of the questionnaire. Since all of the public institutions and most of the private institutions reporting regarded themselves as fundamentally open-door colleges, the placement examinations were used not for admissions but for placement within either developmental programs or within sections of the regular English programs. The 14 institutions reported 7 different tests used as the primary placement device. The most frequently reported test was the Cooperative English Test (CET) which was used by 4 institutions. The American College Testing Program was used by 3 institutions and the Comparative Guidance and Placement Exam was used by 2 institutions. Two institutions used local examinations and the remaining 3 institutions each used one of the following: the California Achievement Test, the New Purdue Placement Test, or the College English Placement Test. Clearly, there was no common test used for placement in English programs in Alabama's junior colleges.

Although 14 institutions used placement tests, only 10 institutions actually determined placement scores and used the test for assignment to remedial

English programs. The CET is the most frequently used testing instrument for assignment of students to a remedial program. Scores reported as minimum levels in the placement of students in various remedial and regular English programs varied widely among the 4 institutions using the CET exam. This may be partly attributed to various forms of the exam being administered but it is also evident that there was little agreement on the relationship between attainment on this particular test and assignment to a remedial program.

No other testing instrument was used to place students in remedial programs by more than one institution; therefore, there was no comparison that could be made. It is apparent that there was no common standard for entry into remedial programs, no standard method of determining who should be in a remedial program, and apparently no systematic application of testing as an evaluative technique in determining entrance to and exit from English programs in Alabama.

Weingarten and Kroeger concluded from their national study that "the problem of identifying students for placement in various English sections does not seem to be solved (14:27)." Alabama fits the national norm on this criterion.

Weingarten and Kroeger state further:

Obviously, with many students needing much help, proper placement, both in remedial and regular English classes, is the first thing a staff must do for effective teaching (14:28).

Again, it is apparent that Alabama faces the same problems and has the same imperatives for future action that the nation at large faces.

### Remedial English Programs

The content of the remedial English programs reported by the Chairmen of the 13 institutions which offered remedial programs was an even balance ~~between~~ grammar and writing. The English faculty concur in indication that grammar and writing have the greatest emphasis and importance in the remedial program. Apparently both English chairmen and faculty members feel there is a strong correlation between the teaching of grammar and improving the student's ability to write. The method of instruction used in the remedial English program as reported by the English faculty suggests some variation from the method used in regular English courses. The lecture is used in about the same proportion. However lecture-discussion technique is used less in remedial programs while the amount of time spent with programmed texts and individualized instruction is significantly higher than that reported for the regular programs. It is possible that this reflects the use of English 2600, English 3200, and similar types of programmed material as reported in the Weingarten-Kroeger study.

This survey of Alabama's English programs does not reveal any other major difference between the contents and methods of instruction employed in remedial English programs and those employed in regular English programs. This conclusion combined with the minimal emphasis upon placement testing suggests that little effort has been applied to the remedial programs to develop them as distinctly different functions to deal with distinctly different problems. It appears that many of the remedial English programs in the state are merely repeats of various components of earlier English programs

from the high school years. The heavy emphasis upon grammar in the remedial programs suggests that many Alabama English instructors are returning to the trough that has been judged barren by much of the research and many of the professionals in our field. Both the Weingarten-Kroeger study and Shugrue's study contained implicit and explicit criticisms of traditional grammar approaches and of the "functional" grammar apparently advocated by a large majority of English teachers in Alabama.

The two national studies contained recommendations for graduate training in composition for English faculty members. If we are to develop meaningful remedial programs in Alabama, it is clearly the responsibility of the graduate training institutions to provide training in composition and in linguistics sufficient to bear upon the problems of remedial education. Alabama especially needs the insights of the linguists in grammar and of graduate English faculties in the teaching of composition. There is little sign of such a development in the state although there is ample testimony to its need.

There is very little data on reading programs as a component of the remedial education effort of the English departments. Eight of the 15 reporting institutions indicate reading is an emphasis in their remedial program but the questionnaire did not provide sufficient opportunity to gain program descriptions. Clearly, reading instruction is an essential component of a remedial program and an area where it appears Alabama is moving very slowly to meet a serious need.

### Regular English

The emphasis of the regular English program as reported by the English department chairmen varies slightly from the specific course objectives as

reported by individual faculty members. In English 101 the department chairmen see the primary emphasis as composition with grammar second and literature a distant third. The faculty see writing as the most important objective in the 101 course with logic second, grammar third, and literature fourth. The heavy emphasis given to logic is an interesting footnote to a situation reported by Weingarten and Kroeger. They indicated that logic was little taught especially when compared with the teaching of the argumentative essay. Since the argumentative essay is so dependent upon logic, Weingarten and Kroeger felt that logic was under-represented in the curriculum and that the students were not given adequate support and preparation for writing the argumentative essay. It would appear that Alabama is not subject to this criticism and that the curriculum in Alabama reflects a more appropriate relationship between the teaching of logic and the use of the argumentative essay. Department chairmen and faculty agreed that the minimum number of essays assigned each quarter and the average number of essays each quarter would be approximately seven. Faculty indicated that the average essay would run slightly under 400 words therefore producing an average writing volume for the quarter of approximately 2800 words. The faculty indicated that these assignments would be fairly evenly distributed among expository, descriptive, narrative, and argumentative essays.

The English department chairmen felt that the 102 course had composition as its primary emphasis with literature and the research paper as very close secondary emphases. Faculty perceived the 102 course as primarily a writing course with a focus upon the research paper and a very minor emphasis on

literature. The faculties' perception of a major role for the research paper may well result from the general aversion faculty members have for the research paper. Department chairmen felt the recommended or average number of essays per quarter should be 5.5 while faculty felt that the minimum number of essays per quarter averaged 6. The range of essays reported for 102 was from a minimum of 4 to a maximum of 12; this contrasts with the 101 sequence where the average was 7 but the range was from a minimum of 4 to a maximum of 24. In the 102 course the faculty members felt the expository essay form was covered most often, with the argumentative essay second, followed distantly by descriptive and narrative forms of the essay. For 102 the average length of the essay was approximately 450 words which produced a total writing output for the quarter of approximately 2700 words.

The amount of writing is a rough gauge to production in an English program and may give some guidance in determining how Alabama's program compares with programs in the nation at large. The Weingarten-Kroeger study reported that in a semester the average 101 class wrote 8.8 essays and the average 102 class wrote 7.5 essays. The average total amount of words produced as reported in the national survey for 101 was 5,000 and for 102 was 5,000. Alabama's English programs are reported on a quarter basis which changes the pattern of essay assignment considerably. It is likely that on a quarter system with the reduced time between classes, an instructor would be less inclined to make frequent assignments and certainly less inclined to make longer assignments since he has less grading time. This may in part indicate why Alabama's English programs require slightly fewer essays

per quarter as contrasted with the national figure given per semester. It also accounts in part for the marked difference in total wordage reported in Alabama's English programs. However, there still is a significant difference between the total wordage assigned on a national level and that assigned in Alabama. The Shugrue survey does not give us any information useful for comparative purposes but a recent study of the Minnesota junior college English programs gives some indications (10). This study reports that the average number of essays assigned per quarter is 7.5 and that the average total volume of writing produced in a quarter normally ranges between 2,000 and 2,500 words. There is no conclusion one can draw from this data with any high degree of certainty. It may be that the quarter system itself is responsible for this difference in the total output of writing since English teachers have great need for out-of-class time during which they can adequately grade and then adequately review themes with students. Without this time there is great pressure upon the English faculty to reduce the number and the length of the essays assigned and indeed there are good pedagogical reasons for doing so. It is also questionable whether the raw quantity of writing produced in a semester is any reasonable criteria for the efficacy of the English program. Nevertheless, Alabama's programs do produce less student writing than reported by Weingarten-Kroeger. This suggests that we must carefully define and wisely develop our writing assignment for maximum effectiveness.

English faculties describe their methods of instruction as almost 50% lecture-discussion for the regular English 101 and 102 sequence. No

~~other method receives significant attention.~~ The lecture receives some attention; the demonstration receives some attention and so does individualized instruction. There is absolutely no use made of team teaching and very minimal use is made of programmed texts. Small-group discussion is notable as an instructional technique that receives little attention within the state. Alabama presents a substantially different pattern from that reported by Weingarten-Kroeger. Lecture-discussion predominates for both, but where the national sample placed small-group work second in frequency, Alabama's faculties report it sixth. The other notable shift is the emphasis in Alabama upon individual instruction and laboratory work which are ranked third and fifth respectively while they were unranked in the national study. What can we conclude from these observations? Very little. Apparently the emphasis in our English programs is upon writing and the method we use to instruct in this is heavily oriented towards talking. Demonstration techniques and individualized instruction together take up just under one-third of the time devoted to instruction which is consistent with the emphasis upon writing. Alabama's faculty apparently have shifted away from the 1965 vogues of team teaching and programmed texts to experiment with individualized instruction and laboratory work.

#### Evaluation

The methods the faculty members use to evaluate their students reveal some very clear patterns. Ninety-five percent of the faculty members reporting do give failing grades in their courses. Two-thirds of the faculty members reporting use departmental grading standards and only 10 percent use

"curved" grades. Faculty members are almost unanimous in stating that they do specify goals to their students for each course, each unit, and indeed for each essay. The basis for evaluation of student output is predominantly teacher evaluation or evaluation in terms of stated criteria. This appears consistent with the report that specified goals are made for each essay and each unit. The least-used basis for evaluation of student output is peer evaluation with self evaluation the second least-used technique. The faculty is generally satisfied that the students do understand their evaluation system.

Staff evaluation presents a situation with greater variety. The faculty felt that they were evaluated primarily by the student and usually by some form of formal questionnaire. Student evaluation was three times more frequent than any other method reported. The second most frequent source of evaluation was the academic dean followed by administration in general, the chairmen, and then the president of the institution. The faculty regarded approximately two-thirds of the evaluation procedures as formal evaluation, a smattering of faculty members reporting confusion about the method of evaluation. Of the 18 department chairmen who responded to this item on the questionnaire, 11 indicated that they evaluated their staff. Those who evaluated their staff were split equally between formal and informal methods of evaluating. Thus it would appear that the English departments in the state avail themselves rather heavily of student evaluation and the students' input while also utilizing formal evaluation by some member of the administration as a strong and frequent support to student opinion. There appears to be very little use of peer evaluation and little use of outside or non-teaching criteria for the evaluation of a faculty member.

### Grade Distributions and Student Retention

One section of the dean's questionnaire requested grade distributions for faculty at their institutions. The results of this section constituted one of the major surprises to the researcher. During this year's work with English faculties, the most frequent concerns articulated by English faculty members have been concern for standards, laments about the quality of the students with which they deal, and chagrin over the impotence they feel in facing the task of causing their students to learn. This series of faculty attitudes combined with the institutional orientations toward transfer programs and traditional college patterns led this researcher to assume that large numbers of Alabama's freshman English students would receive failing grades or withdraw from English courses. While this is true at some institutions, it is not true for the state at large. The grade distributions as reported indicated that better than 71 percent (71.3 percent) of the students in freshman English in Alabama receive a grade of C or better while the remaining 29 percent (28.7) receive a grade of D or lower or withdraw from their course. This is virtually a triumph of persistence. The Weingarten-Kroeger Study reported between 55 and 58 percent of all the students receiving grades from A to C with 42-45 percent receiving a grade of D or lower or withdrawing. It appears from these figures that Alabama students receive slightly higher grades than those in the national study. This would suggest that English programs are not driving students away since almost three-quarters of the students who begin a course appear to successfully complete it.

There is one cautionary note. There are slightly more remedial programs existent in Alabama than were reported in the national survey although we have no way of comparing the actual numbers of students contained in each program. It is this researcher's suspicion that the numbers contained in the Alabama program are quite small compared with the national level but there is no way of establishing this from the data available. In any event, remedial students were included in this grade distribution whether they received regular grades or an S-U option. Those receiving an "S" were counted as receiving credit in the A to C range - those with the "U" in the D or below range. The impact of this number upon the grade distributions of Alabama might account to some degree for the shift upward from the national level but it is very unlikely that it accounts for the truly significant difference that appears.

The grade distributions reported for Alabama students should also be assessed against an additional criteria: the retention figures reported by the Astin Study (1). If the grades reported in Alabama's English programs actually reflect student achievement, then almost three-quarters of the students who entered English programs were successful and did profit from them. Astin reports figures for the retention rate of students in two-year colleges across the nation as of 1970. He found that approximately 65 percent of any given group of students entering a junior college survived to pass on into the second year. It is impossible and unwarranted to link Astin's figure of a 65 percent one year retention rate with Alabama's English students - approximately 75 percent success rate in the English program. However, it certainly raises questions which ought to be explored in further work. What is the relationship between success in a freshman English course and survival in the college?

Do students who fail in the freshman English programs survive in the total curriculum? What is the role of the remedial program in establishing this higher ratio of success for Alabama English programs than is the national norm for retention in the college? These and other questions certainly warrant exploration.

There was a mild attempt through the dean's questionnaire to establish the retention rate at the various junior colleges in the state. The results were extremely questionable because of the type of question asked in the questionnaire and because of the wide variance in responses suggesting that there was some confusion about the data called for. Nevertheless colleges in Alabama report a retention rate from the first to the second year that ranges from an average of 42 percent for one institution to an average of 88 percent for another with the average figure for all institutions reporting 63 percent. This 63 percent figure corresponds rather closely to the approximately 65 percent retention figure cited by Astin for retention in junior colleges over the nation at large. While this data may be interesting, it certainly provides no additional insight to this observer about the causes and relationships implicit. Again, further research is certainly warranted. Chart II is appended to indicate the range of grade distributions and retention rates of the various colleges. Great caution is necessary in dealing with these figures but they do provide a useful form of raw data for future work.

### Conclusions

A descriptive study of this sort does not allow us to draw hard and fast conclusions. It does, however, supply a body of information from which we

CHART II

GRADE DISTRIBUTIONS AND STUDENT RETENTION BY INSTITUTION

Grade Distribution

INSTITUTION

	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	76	77	78	79	Ave. Ala.	Nat. Ave. (2)
Percent A - C		72		69	78		76	58			79	65	74		83	65		64	79	78	72	61	71.3	55.58
Percent D - I		28		31	22		24	42			21	35	26		17	35		36	21	22	28	39	28.7	45.42

Student Retention

INSTITUTION

	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	76	77	78	79	Ave. Ala.	Nat. Ave. (2)
Percent Retained																								
1969		59	88	60	71		70	77			85	50	86		50	33			84	75	78	58		
1970		65	78	92	78		58	61			86	47	67		42	51			73	67	82	57		
1971							93	52			89	52			54				79	56				
Weighted Average		62	83	74	75		73	62			88	50	76		49	42			78	66	80	58	61	63

1 Retention here means full-time students who enter as freshmen and are still enrolled the following fall.

2 Active study (1)

can work and does point in some directions. It is possible from this material to develop insight into the problems associated with three areas of freshman English programs in Alabama junior colleges. First, entry level to freshman English programs is a problem area. There is no consistent pattern of placement exams used in the state and within those exams which are used there is no consistent pattern for sorting students into remedial programs or into homogeneous configurations within the regular English program. There are no clear linkages between devices used and the course or section in which students are placed. There are few complete and satisfactory remedial English programs in the state. There is an awesome need for experimental work, data gathering, research, and for a commitment of time and resources to develop adequate remedial programs. A linkage between placement exams, the diagnostic function, and placement is essential to a successful remedial program. Additionally, there is a need for adequate "feed-in" from the remedial program or repair program into the regular English program. Applications of diagnostic testing and developmental lab sequences as a support - not a substitute - for the regular English program might be considered as alternatives to the classroom-based remedial program. There is very little indication of a strong counseling component in remedial English programs in Alabama, and there is little evidence on the national scene that programs without a strong counseling component had any chance of success. Therefore the contributions of counseling to remedial work should be explored.

The English curriculum itself is an area with several problems. The English programs available in Alabama's junior colleges are clearly transfer-oriented

English programs. There is no evidence available to indicate that the transfer programs do indeed meet the needs of the students as they come to junior colleges. This narrow curriculum needs to be looked at in terms of identifiable student needs and community needs, and in terms of the success of the students in this narrow curriculum. Should junior colleges in this state develop alternative English curriculum patterns, more closely related to the institutional goals specified in the legislation for and catalogs of public junior colleges in this state? The institutional goals envision programs in technical education, general education, and transfer education along with the usual range of adult and continuing education programs. There are a few if any programs in the English curriculum which appear consistent with any but the transfer education function. It might be well to consider programs in technical English and general education, and to consider laboratory-based English instruction and competency-based English curricula suitable for the adult student and for part-time students. In short the English curriculum in this state is terribly narrow and it would appear desirable to consider widening it for the benefit of the student.

A third major area which warrants attention is the area of retention and grade distribution as reported in this study. How many students who enter as freshmen actually complete the program and pass out at the end of two years with a successful college experience? We really don't know. This study gives only marginal information, information which indicates that about 60 percent of the students survive the first year and that, by interpolation, between 30 and 40 percent of the entering students complete the second year. This is consistent with Autry's studies on a national level (3), but we are not sure of the specific

figures within Alabama. What correlations exist between various student variables and student success in college? Grade distributions as reported vary significantly from those reported in the nation at large; this variation should be explored. Does any relationship exist between an institution's grade distribution and its retention rate? In short, there is a great deal of information we need to develop about student variables as related to institutions' retention rates and grade distributions in English programs. This study does not adequately approach these questions. It does point up the existence of yawning gaps in our knowledge.

One final area of information was provided by this study. The English programs in this state are concerned primarily with composition. There is very little indication from the interviews with faculty members that they have ever received professional graduate level instruction in composition, in the teaching of composition, in the applications of grammar to composition, or in the motivational factors related to teaching composition to non-verbal students. This problem is not unique to Alabama; it is reported again and again throughout the nation. Yet in Alabama, a leader in the design and delivery of in-service training to junior college people, it seems tragic and inappropriate that the resources of the graduate English faculties in the state have never been brought to bear on problems of composition and the teaching of composition in the junior college.

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PARTICIPATING COLLEGES

Alabama Christian College, Montgomery  
Alexander City State Junior College, Alexander City  
Brewer State Junior College, Fayette  
Cullman College, Cullman  
Enterprise State Junior College, Enterprise  
Gadsden State Junior College, Gadsden  
George C. Wallace State Junior College, Selma  
George C. Wallace State Technical Junior College, Dothan  
Jefferson Davis State Junior College, Brewton  
Jefferson State Junior College, Birmingham  
John C. Calhoun State Junior College, Decatur  
Lurleen B. Wallace State Junior College, Andalusia  
Northeast Alabama State Junior College, Phil Campbell  
Patrick Henry State Junior College, Monroeville  
S. D. Bishop State Junior College, Mobile  
Selma University, Selma  
Snead State Junior College, Boaz  
Southern Union State Junior College, Wadley  
Theodore Alfred Lawson State Junior College, Birmingham  
Walker College, Jasper

Guide to Interview I

Dean of Instruction/Registrar

1. Establish enrollment figures for required, freshman English courses.

	<u>First Q.</u>	<u>Second Q.</u>	<u>Third Q.</u>
1969			
1970			
1971			

2. How many entering students persist to become second year students?

	#	%
1969		
1970		
1971		

3. Do you have grade distributions for the required English courses by instructor?

instructor

course

distribution      A    B    C    D    F    I    WP    WF

4. Do you use ACT research reports?

What % of students score 1-15 on English sub-test?

What is mean English sub-test score?  
composite?

5. If available, what % of your students

1. transfer to a 4-year college? \_\_\_\_\_

2. complete a terminal curriculum and  
take a job in that field? \_\_\_\_\_

3. graduate (but not 1 or 2)? \_\_\_\_\_

Guide to Interview II

Chairman of English Department

A. Teaching Conditions

1. average number of sections/full-time faculty member.
2. average number of preparations/full-time faculty member.
3. average faculty teaching load in quarter hours.
4. average section sizes for

composition  
literature  
not separated  
Remedial reading  
Remedial writing

B. Program

1. Placement

exam used \_\_\_\_\_  
cut-off scores \_\_\_\_\_  
remedial English \_\_\_\_\_ admissions \_\_\_\_\_

2. Remedial English/Reading

a. program emphasis

\_\_\_\_\_ grammar \_\_\_\_\_ writing \_\_\_\_\_ reading \_\_\_\_\_ other \_\_\_\_\_

describe program -

b. number of students in Remedial English/Reading

/ at beginning Fall Quarter \_\_\_\_\_ W. Quarter \_\_\_\_\_

at end Fall Quarter \_\_\_\_\_ W. Quarter \_\_\_\_\_

# transferred to Eng. 101 \_\_\_\_\_

# retained in Remedial Eng. \_\_\_\_\_

# lost \_\_\_\_\_



## MEDIA

1. tape recorder
2. access to language lab
3. overhead projectors/room darkeners
4. transparency production
5. ditto machine
6. photo production (slides)

Guide to Interview III

English Faculty

A. Method of Instruction

1. Indicate % of time spent with each method:

	<u>Reading</u>	<u>Remedial</u>	<u>Regular</u>		
		Comp.	Lit	Comp.	Lit
lecture					
small group discussion					
lecture/discussion					
demonstration					
team teaching					
programmed texts					
individualized inst.					
laboratory					

B. Evaluation

1. Do you give failing grades?
2. Do you use departmental grading standards?
3. Do you "curve" grades?
4. Do you specify goals to yourself-students for  
each course?  
each unit?  
each essay?
5. What basis do you use for evaluating each student output?
6. Do students understand your evaluation system?
7. Who evaluates you? How?

C. Course Objectives

1. Indicate the two most important areas of each course.

Indicate form	oral	research
<u>writing</u> <u>lit.</u>	<u>expression</u> <u>logic</u>	<u>papers</u> <u>grammar</u>

099

101

102

103

D. Course Content

099 101 102 103

minimum # essays/quarter

average length of essay

types covered

expository

descriptive

narrative

argumentative

do you teach grammar?

what form?

E. Attitudes toward:

Open-door admissions

Remedial Education

Academic standards