

Working Together: Student-Faculty Interaction and the Boise State Stretch Program

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ABSTRACT: In this article, I describe how policy changes instituted by our State Board of Education prompted the composition faculty at Boise State University to develop a Stretch program. Our goal was to support basic writing students by linking two writing courses (one of which is non-credit-bearing), thus allowing students to remain with the same classmates and professor for a full year instead of just one semester. I discuss the history and challenges of our Stretch program and detail our assessment of it, which reveals a positive impact on student retention, G.P.A, and writing ability. While there are too many variables to claim that the Stretch program alone is responsible for the positive outcomes, research shows that increased student-faculty interaction, a significant feature of the Stretch program, does reinforce student learning. We are using evidence of this research and our assessment to develop the program and advance the argument that students should receive full credit for both semesters of the Stretch sequence.

KEYWORDS: Stretch programs; basic writing; first-year composition; collaboration; program assessment; student-faculty interaction; college credit

THE STRETCH PROGRAM AT BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY

Origins

In 2002, the State Board of Education (SBOE) changed its placement policy for enrollment in composition classes (“Admissions”) at Boise State University. The change increased from about 350 to about 500 the number of students required to take basic writing (English 90), a non-credit-bearing course, and it began to charge them an additional fee of \$30. We believed students were being penalized by the additional fee. We also wanted to develop effective ways to support our basic writers, so we decided, in effect, to give the fee back to students and use it to enhance their experience. At the same time, we wanted to document their achievements in order to argue that English 90 should be for credit. Our hope was that by demonstrating students’ academic achievement, the department, college, and the SBOE

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would share our view that these students—many of whom (40%) *choose* to enroll in a non-credit-bearing course in order to better prepare themselves for their college course work—should be rewarded, not penalized, for their efforts.

In this article, I describe the Stretch program that we created to provide additional support to English 90 students. I also describe the assessment methods we used—analysis of student success in terms of course completion and student retention rates, evaluation of student portfolios, and interviews with faculty and students—to determine the impact of the program on student success. All of our assessments show that students who complete the Stretch program perform significantly better in all areas studied. The most successful aspect of our Stretch program, however, may be the simple fact that it allows students and faculty to spend more time together by pairing students with the same instructor for a full year. The added semester provides faculty with additional time to identify and address individual student needs and creates an environment in which students feel more confident as writers. As I describe below, research indicates that it may be this prolonged contact that not only does the work of increasing student confidence, but also helps students make gains in the other areas we assessed.

Unfortunately, our efforts to demonstrate that students deserve college writing credit for this course have been met with resistance from the department and the college for the common reasons. Basic writing students, some say, are working to achieve a level of writing proficiency that “good” students have already achieved. This commonplace is applied to *all* basic writing students—children of migrant farm workers, adult speakers of other languages, and recent graduates from our local high schools. Others note in the current language of economics that linking two courses together, as we have done in the Stretch program, *adds no value* to the sequence, and therefore there is no reason for offering credit for English 90 or for listing the course sequence in the catalog. At the root of these arguments lies the unstated claim that a clear and stable definition of college-level writing exists and that basic writing students produce essays that fall short of this level. By extension, then, writers who do not meet the standard do not deserve college credit for their work, while writers who meet or exceed it *do* deserve credit. This claim, though, is hard to defend. If such a standard really does exist, then why do students enrolled in our writing courses designed for ESL learners earn credit for their writing? We know that students in our ESL courses often write at a considerably lower level than our basic writing students. In fact, we encourage our ESL students to increase their proficiency

by completing the basic writing course before enrolling in the mainstream composition sequence. I am not arguing that there should be no standards for college-level writing, but rather that students come into our classes with a variety of strengths and weaknesses, and we assess their writing over time and often as a part of a portfolio of writing. Determining in advance that a group of students are not writing at the college level, before even reading any of their essays, suggests that the institution relies on an elusive concept of basic writing in order to maintain an equally elusive definition of “standard” college-level writing. As long as there are basic writers and basic writing, then those students who do not fall into this category must necessarily be the “real thing”; they are the exemplary students worthy of time, attention, and college credit. In developing Stretch at Boise, we have worked to document basic writers’ efforts and accomplishments in order to show that they merit the same time, attention, and credit as any of the student writers we serve.

In her detailed history of basic writing at Boise State, Karen Uehling demonstrates that the concept of basic writing has functioned, at least in part, as a way for the University to improve its status. Uehling notes that “there has been a basic writing course at Boise State” since the 1930s when the school opened as a junior college (147). She notes that “students who did not place into regular freshman writing began, in 1933, to take a kind of modern five-hour ‘stretch’ course” (147). By 1952, the department “created its first clearly described basic writing course” for which, because it was seen as a high school review course, “no credit was offered” (147). Uehling further notes that “the ‘quality’ of students was not an issue in the early years” of Boise State, but “as the community college developed in the 1950s and especially in the 1960s when Boise State was nearing four-year status, student quality emerged as a concern. That is, the legacy of diversity of the community was weighed increasingly against a sense of excellence and perhaps elitism, notions that affected how basic writing students were perceived” (148). Boise State currently finds itself enmeshed in this same space of redefinition. Through the 2000s, the University has raised its admissions standards, which are now the highest in the State. During the same period, the administration has pushed the faculty to produce more research and reduced the teaching load to facilitate research productivity. The University has also heavily promoted its football program, which has attained national prominence. Finally, it has been instrumental in the creation of a local community college. In the 1950s, non-credit basic writing courses emerged as the junior college pushed to become a four-year state college. In the 2000s,

non-credit basic writing courses remain intractable as the University pushes to redefine itself as a research institution. It is as if basic writing and basic writers are a necessary part of our institution's image of itself. Without basic writers, how would we know what "standard" is?

THE STRETCH PROGRAM AT ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

The First-Year Writing Program at Boise State, under the leadership of Bruce Ballenger (Director) and Michelle Payne (Associate Director), used some of the student fees generated by the SBOE's new policy to provide additional training to basic writing faculty and also to invite Greg Glau to describe the Stretch program that he administered at Arizona State. Though the institutional contexts of Boise State and Arizona State differ significantly, the composition faculty decided to institute a pilot Stretch program of its own to see if Stretch would have a positive impact on student learning.

The Stretch Program that Glau and others developed at ASU is "a two-semester sequence that 'stretches' ENG101 over two semesters" ("The 'Stretch'" 79). Before the Stretch program, basic writing students at Arizona State began with the no-credit ENG071, a required, non-credit-bearing pre-requisite for English 101. The Stretch program did away with ENG071. Instead, basic writing students enrolled in a course that *stretched* the contents of ENG101 over two semesters. In other words, instead of a two-semester sequence (071 followed by 101), students enrolled in a two-semester version of 101. They worked with the same peer group and the same instructor for the entire year, and—significantly—they received credit for both classes (I discuss below some of the impact of non credit-bearing status of English 90 on our students). The shift from the original sequence to the Stretch Program sequence also shifted how basic writing students were conceptualized within the institution. As Glau puts it, the Stretch Program "*sees . . . beginning writers as just as capable as their ENG101 counterparts; we just give them an extra semester to work on their writing*" (80). Glau reports that more students pass the first semester course of the Stretch Program than they did ENGL071, and more students enroll in and complete the second semester of the two-semester sequence than they did under the previous system (84-85).

In Glau's follow-up study of the program ten years later, he reports reliably impressive outcomes ("*Stretch at 10*"). Glau notes that Stretch students "consistently pass ENG 101 at a higher rate than do their counterparts who take traditional ENG 101," and they "consistently pass ENG 102 at a higher

rate than do their traditional ENG 101 counterparts” (38). That students at ASU *consistently* achieved such positive results over the course of a decade provided momentum for the development of a Stretch program on our campus. Our faculty anticipated similar outcomes, but further speculated that the success of Arizona State’s Stretch program rested, at least in part, on *how* students were conceptualized as just as capable as any college writer. From the beginning of ASU’s program, basic writing students were invited to the main campus from the local community college, where they had been required to take the non-credit “ENG 071, a ‘remedial’ class” (“Stretch” 79). On the main campus of ASU, those same basic writers were not only given college credit for their work, but they were also provided with additional writing support. They were rewarded for and supported in their work. We hoped that if our students achieved higher rates of success, even without the advantage of course credit, then our argument for the creation of a credit-bearing course would be strengthened.

THE STRETCH PROGRAM AT BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY

Administrative and Curricular Design

The results of Stretch at Arizona State in terms of student success were so impressive that faculty at Boise State made plans to pilot a Stretch program of its own, to begin in the fall of 2005. In making this decision, faculty recognized that there were significant institutional differences that would impact our results. For example, at Arizona State, students were brought to the main campus from a local community college, whereas our students were already enrolled on our main campus. Arizona State’s program “was designed to replace remedial word-and-phrase level instruction with the practice of multiple discourse strategies,” but at Boise State students were already working in groups and conferencing with their professors before revising their essays (79). Another significant difference is that Arizona’s “*Stretch* classes were initially capped at 22 students, as compared to 26 in traditional ENG 101 classrooms” (“*Stretch* at 10” 34). At Boise State in 2002, all composition courses were capped at 27; this number has since been reduced to 25. The number of students required to take this course at Boise State was also significantly smaller, less than half the number at Arizona State. The most important contrast, though, is that Boise State’s basic writing course, English 90, is non-credit-bearing, and it appears as though it will remain so for the foreseeable future.

In spite of these differences, Boise State's faculty wanted to pilot Stretch as another way to support basic writing students. We knew that students who enrolled in English 90 (basic writing) performed better in English 101 (the first semester of the credit-bearing, two-semester composition sequence) than students who enrolled directly into English 101.¹ We also knew that students who completed English 90 before enrolling in English 101 were significantly more likely to be retained one year later (70%) than students who enrolled directly into English 101 (57%). We hoped that our Stretch program would have the same kind of positive impact on our already strong retention numbers. We further hoped that a comprehensive assessment of the success of English 90 students—increased retention, better performance in English 101, and writing portfolio assessments that demonstrated a high level of writing proficiency—would persuade our department, college, university, and the SBOE that English 90 students deserved college credit for their work. All of the data suggested that even without the Stretch program students were more likely to succeed than students who enrolled directly in English 101. It seemed reasonable, then, to *encourage* students to take this course since over the long term it enhanced their likelihood of success.

Confronting Issues of Continuity

We decided to develop a yearlong course in which we stretched the English 101 curriculum over two semesters. Administratively we still had (and continue to have) two separate courses (English 90 and English 101). In our Stretch program, students have to enroll in English 90 in the fall and English 101 in the spring. What we were able to do, though, was to limit the spring English 101 enrollments in Stretch designated classes to just those students who were enrolled in Stretch designated sections of fall semester English 90. If a student takes English 90 with me in the fall semester, for example, then she is guaranteed a spot in my section of English 101 in the spring semester. In this way, students who want to continue working with the same instructor and the same students for an entire year are able to do so.

When we began the program, we hoped that, as at Arizona State, most students would be able to complete the program. Glau reports being “concerned that many students would be unable for some reason (they got a job, perhaps) to take the ‘linked’ section of ENG101 and would have to be moved to another class. This concern turned out to be false, however, as so far less than one percent of our students have had scheduling difficulties from one semester to the next” (“The ‘Stretch’ ” 82). We, however, have had

a relatively high rate of instability from one semester to the next. In academic years 05-06 and 06-07, for example, of the 243 students who entered Stretch sections of Eng 90, only 120, or 49%, completed Stretch English 101 with the same instructor. According to students, much of this instability has to do with factors outside the classroom, such as conflicts with work and family responsibilities. Still, the reality that not even a majority of students were able to complete the Stretch sequence with the same instructor called into question the very definition of a Stretch student. This definition would have an impact on our assessment. If a Stretch student is anyone who enters English 90 without regard to whether or not she continues with the same instructor into English 101, then the impact of the program is considerably less significant than it would be if we limited our study to students who actually went through both semesters of the Stretch sequence. While recognizing that we have no way of determining *why* some students remain in Stretch and others do not—are those who remain simply better students or students with more resources?—we decided to count as Stretch students only those who completed the Stretch sequence during the pilot phase (2005-2007) of the program. In order to maintain consistency, I analyzed the results of the 2008-2009 academic year using the same logic: I counted as Stretch only those students who completed both segments of the Stretch sequence with the same instructor. The analysis and my conclusions, then, are based on those students who completed the program. Armed with the results of the Stretch program on the students who could complete both semesters with the same instructor, we have gone into English 90 classes to promote the benefits of remaining with the same instructor, but our efforts have not had an impact on re-enrollment.

Designing a Shared Syllabus

For two years (2005-2007), we assigned the “Stretch” designation to five fall sections of English 90 and five spring sections of English 101. For a variety of administrative reasons, mainly having to do with the significantly higher number of English 90 courses offered in the fall and the complications of staffing part-time faculty, we were able to include some but not all spring and summer sections of English 90 in our program. The pilot sections of Stretch were taught by three faculty members: Laura, Jen, and Garawyn. Since the Stretch designation was made within the department, we didn’t have to change the administrative structure for the Stretch sections. We focused, instead, on the curricular structure and developed a

yearlong syllabus, knowing that we would need to accommodate students who would not be able to complete the Stretch program. We had to both conceive of a yearlong sequence and make sure that students who were unable to complete the sequence would be prepared to either move into a section of Stretch English 101 with another instructor or move into a section of Mainstream English 101.²

To accommodate these conflicting needs, we designed a syllabus with two repeating elements: The first assignment of the first semester (a personal narrative) was revised and included as a part of one of the later assignments of the second semester, and the last assignment of the first semester (an opinion essay) was revised to become a part of the first assignment of the second semester (a persuasive essay; see Appendix A). In this way, the curriculum built a bridge between the two semesters, and it allowed students to work on the same piece of writing for an extended period of time. The syllabus also built in the opportunity for students to review and revise their earliest writing just as the year was coming to an end, an experience that proved very powerful to many students. This sequence of assignments in the Stretch sections of English 90—three or four longer pieces during the English 90 course—also mirrored the course structure of Mainstream English 90. We were assured, then, that Stretch students would receive the same preparation for English 101 as their Mainstream counterparts.

We kept to the principle of maximum flexibility within our standardized syllabus. That is, we wanted to develop a sequence of assignments that engaged students in the work of the yearlong course, but we didn't want the syllabus to be so standardized that individual instructors' creativity, initiative, and preferences were stifled or eliminated. Thus, though the assignments were the same in principle, the names faculty chose to call those assignments—for example, the “documented perspective essay” and the “research essay” to describe the same assignment—were left up to the individual. Instructors also chose the readings they wanted to use with each assignment, and they determined the sequence of readings and writings within each assignment as well as the amount of time devoted to each assignment.

The development of the shared syllabus proved both difficult and rewarding. All three faculty members resisted and resented having to give up, in some cases, a favorite assignment whose value others didn't see, and having to use another assignment that they had not previously tested and in which they may have had little faith. Ultimately, however, they agreed that the exercise of creating a shared syllabus, and a syllabus that spanned

both semesters, was productive and rewarding. They reported great satisfaction in having tried out a new assignment, which they may originally have resisted, because the new approaches provided fresh ideas about how to teach basic writing. Perhaps most importantly, though, they loved the fact that, since they were all doing more or less the same class work as their colleagues, they had common ground for discussion about the progress of their classes. The informal mailroom meetings took on a new significance as they realized that they had formed a faculty learning community. When we expanded the Stretch program to include all sections of English 90, we retained the collaboratively developed syllabus, with all teaching faculty contributing to its structure.

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Statistical Measures: Completion Rates, GPAs, and Retention

In the assessment of student performance that follows, a Stretch student during the pilot phase is defined as a student who completed the Stretch designated sections of English 90 and English 101 (see Appendix B). For the sake of comparison, I also show overall (Mainstream and Stretch) English 90 performance during the pilot phase of our Stretch program. In the fall of 2008, all English 90 classes were designated Stretch. The second chart in Appendix B shows enrollments in the 2008-2009 academic year, the first year that every section of English 90 was designated Stretch.”

The data for the years 2005 through 2007 show that Stretch students completed English 101 at the same rate as their Mainstream English 90 counterparts and more frequently than their Mainstream English 101 counterparts. In 2008, when all English 90 sections were designated Stretch, students were still more likely to complete English 101 than their Mainstream English 101 counterparts. During the pilot phase, Stretch English 90 students were more likely to enroll in English 102 than their Mainstream English 90 counterparts, but not nearly as likely to enroll as their Mainstream English 101 counterparts. During the 2008-2009 academic year, English 90 students were less likely to enroll in English 101 than in any of the previous years. This might be due, however, to the fact that students who began in 2005 and 2006 have had a longer period of time to complete this course than students who began in 2008. Stretch students from this period who do enroll in English 101, however, are more likely to complete the course than Stretch students

from 2005-2007 and students who enrolled directly into English 101 from 2005-2007. The Stretch students from fall 2008 are also more likely than any other student to enroll in English 102; completion rates are not yet available. Since the higher frequency of 2008 Stretch completion rates in both English 101 and enrollment rates in English 102 remains in place even if it is measured against the performance of *all* English 90 students from 2005-2007, both Stretch and Mainstream, the Stretch program appears to have a positive effect on student re-enrollments.

The GPA calculation for this study breaks students into three groups: those who completed Stretch with the same instructor, those who did not, and those who began their composition sequence in English 101. Within this particular configuration, Stretch students' GPA is very compelling. According to the analysis of the statistics for 2005-2007, performed by Marcia Belcheir at the Office of Institutional Assessment, for "cumulative GPA, students who enrolled in a [Mainstream] ENGL 90 course had GPAs that were *significantly lower* than any of the other groups. Students in the Stretch Program had cumulative GPAs that were *statistically indistinguishable* from students who began in ENGL 101" (emphasis added). Students enrolled in a Mainstream section of English 90 had over the course of two years a cumulative GPA of 2.06; students who completed the Stretch program had a cumulative GPA of 2.36, and students who began the composition sequence in English 101 had a cumulative GPA of 2.48. Within the limits of this study, it's not possible to determine if the Stretch students' success is a *result* of Stretch or if it's the *result* of other factors. However, we have reason to believe that increased faculty-student contact is at least in part responsible for the higher rate of Stretch student achievement.

The retention data is also interesting. For the period from 2005 through 2007, 76% of students who completed the Stretch program were enrolled the next fall, an increase in the overall retention rate of 70% of English 90 students from the 2002-2004 period. However, only 62% of students who completed Mainstream English 90 were enrolled after one year, and only 62% of students who completed Mainstream English 101. Of the 2007-2008 group, 80% of Stretch students were enrolled the next fall, 59% of the Mainstream English 90 students were enrolled the next fall, and 55% of Mainstream English 101 students were enrolled the next fall.

The GPA and retention data sheds light on the Stretch program, but is inconclusive since it measures those students who, for unknown reasons, are *able* to complete the Stretch sequence with the same instructor against student who are *unable* to complete the sequence with the same instructor.

Although the 2008-2009 data indicate that the Stretch program has a significant positive impact on all students, it is not possible to determine why students from the pilot phase completed the Stretch sequence. In other words, are the positive results for the Stretch program simply a result of the fact that more determined students make it a priority to complete the program, or is there something intrinsic to the Stretch program itself that helps students achieve these impressive results? In addition, many other uncontrollable variables have affected English 90 enrollments during the course of this study. For example, the university has raised its overall admissions standards and has ceased to be an open admissions institution. At the same time, a new community college—the first in the metropolitan area—began operation in spring 2009, and the success of our athletic program has dramatically changed the profile of the university within the State.

It is impossible to say whether or not all of these changes have had an impact on how Stretch students perform or on the concept of basic writing itself. Enrollment in English 90 has remained more or less stable, and the administration has not indicated that it's time for these courses to go away altogether. It is perhaps because basic writing is already so firmly marginalized that it has not come under attack. It could also be, of course, that the administration and even the athletic department understand that this course, non-credit-bearing though it is, contributes to students' success. Members of the coaching staff, for example, routinely communicate with basic writing faculty to make sure that the student athletes are performing well. If faculty report problems, the coaching staff work harder to support the student in his efforts; faculty are never pressured to make exceptions for athletes. What does remain consistent, though, is that students who complete the Stretch Program with the same instructor perform significantly better on most statistical measures than those students who do not complete Stretch with the same instructor and those students who begin the composition sequence in English 101. These positive results are further supported by assessment of Stretch student portfolios.

Portfolio Assessment

Assessment of student portfolios, in place since 1998, is an integral part of the first-year writing program. We collect portfolios from about 10% of all composition students—over 700 portfolios—every year. Although assessment methods and course outcomes have changed over the last ten years, the process for assessing the portfolios has remained more or less the

same. Every spring, after the semester ends, between ten and twenty faculty members gather for a two-day portfolio reading session. We evaluate the portfolios based on the outcomes that faculty use to develop their syllabi (see Appendix C). Once we have the portfolios in hand, we discuss what constitutes evidence that students have achieved the outcomes.

English 90 students, both before the Stretch Program was begun and since it has been in place, are consistently assessed as either proficient or highly proficient. For example, in 2001, 2003, and 2006, all of the English 90 portfolios were assessed as either proficient or highly proficient. In 2002 and 2009, over 88% of the portfolios were assessed as either proficient or highly proficient. There is no English 101 portfolio assessment of students who completed English 90 *before* they enrolled in English 101, so it isn't possible to measure the proficiency levels for these students.

In the summer of 2009, a separate, independent study was conducted in which 9 portfolios from the spring 2006 Stretch sections of English 101 were mixed with 21 randomly chosen Mainstream English 101 portfolios from fall, 2005. Readers were not told the purpose of the assessment, but were asked to assess the portfolios following the same guidelines that they used when they assessed portfolios drawn from the whole program. The two assessors, Mark and Melissa, are part-time faculty at Boise State. Both had participated in the general assessment in the spring of 2009, and so had significant, recent experience applying the assessment criteria to portfolios. In addition, both had been trained to teach in the Stretch program, and had already taught all or part of a Stretch sequence. Mark scored 5 of the 21 Mainstream English 101 portfolios as not proficient (24%); Melissa scored 6 of the Mainstream English 101 portfolios as not proficient (29%), both of which are reasonably close to the overall assessment of English 101 portfolios. Mark and Melissa rated the same 5 Mainstream English 101 portfolios as not proficient; Melissa rated one additional portfolio not proficient.

The results of the Stretch English 101 portfolio assessment are much worse—until we consider the reasons *why* so many of the portfolios were rated not proficient. Of the 9 Stretch English 101 portfolios, both Mark and Melissa rated the same 6 as not proficient (67%), but their reasons are revealing. In the “comments” section of the assessment write-up, for example, Mark wrote of one Stretch English 101 portfolio that it “contained strong pieces of writing, but there is no reflective essay and no evidence of process.” Mark specifically notes on 3 of the 6 not proficient portfolios that, overall, the writing was strong, and had the writer included a reflective cover letter that he would likely have marked the portfolio proficient. He notes on the

fourth not-proficient essay that the student has written “a good research essay that integrates source material and personal experience,” suggesting that the lack of a cover letter, and not the writing itself, compelled Mark to rate that portfolio as not proficient. Melissa rated the same 6 portfolios not proficient, and for the same reasons. In the notes section of each of her rating sheets, Melissa writes that the lack of a cover letter is a major weakness of the portfolio since without it she couldn’t assess the student’s sense of his or her own revision strategies or ability to articulate rhetorical choices. In only two cases did she note an additional problem that might by itself have earned the portfolio a ranking of not proficient.

Why did so many of the Stretch portfolios not contain the reflective essays that Mark and Melissa were looking for? Since 2005-2006, the requirements for portfolio contents have been revised to require cover letters, and those cover letters must address (among other things) students’ views of their own rhetorical choices. Many of the portfolios that Mark and Melissa assessed did not contain cover letters simply because they weren’t required when the portfolios were created. If we account for the lack of cover letters, then, we can conclude that the writing in this small sample of the Stretch English 101 portfolios is comparable to the Mainstream English 101 portfolios. Furthermore, Mark’s and Melissa’s ratings were very nearly identical, which suggests a high degree of reliability. In addition, when I interviewed Mark and Melissa after the assessment process, I was able to determine, before I revealed to them the purpose of the assessment, that neither one of them had guessed that nearly one-third of the portfolios they were reading were from sections of Stretch English 101. Students who completed the Stretch sequence, then, achieved portfolio assessment results largely indistinguishable from students who enrolled in Mainstream English 101. The faculty hoped that this result would help persuade the department that English 90 students were indeed performing at the college level.

As of this writing, we are in the process of proposing, for the third time, that English 90 courses be for credit, and we intend to use the evidence that I have gathered and reported in this article. I anticipate that faculty will argue that this portfolio assessment only demonstrates that English 90 is doing the work it was designed to do: prepare students to be successful in English 101. I aim to make the case that students should be *encouraged* to take courses that increase their proficiency, GPA, and retention rates. The fact that these students create portfolios that echo the findings of the statistical analysis should make this argument airtight.

Reports from Student and Faculty Interviews

The positive statistical and portfolio results for those who complete Stretch with the same instructor are echoed in student and faculty interviews, which provide a compelling argument for the continuation and expansion of the Stretch program. The interviews overwhelmingly support the notion that the increased contact between students and faculty is one of the most productive features of Stretch. A returning student, Dan, noted that the Stretch program “was great . . . I think [Stretch] makes it a lot smoother to go from a high school transition or into a college level, or, like I said, being out of school for many years. . . . The thing I like about going from English 90 to 101 is that it takes a lot of the intimidation out. You don’t feel like you have to be a word wizard, like you have to be a genius. . . . It does make the transition a lot easier, you don’t feel so, oh boy I’m bewildered and intimidated.” Both students and faculty get to know each other better than they would be able to in a one-semester class, and both report greater comfort, better learning and teaching, and higher overall satisfaction. The increased level of predictability—that is, students’ ability to predict how their professors will react from one semester to the next—and faculty knowledge of student performance are the two areas of the Stretch experience noted by both students and faculty that offer the strongest argument for implementing a Stretch program.

Scholarship on the subject of student-faculty involvement demonstrates a convincing correlation between the enhanced student-faculty contact afforded by the Stretch program, retention rates, and GPA. In their study of 766 freshmen at Syracuse University, Ernest Pascarella and Patrick Terenzini built upon their own previous work and the work of other scholars who have demonstrated that a high level of student-faculty interaction is associated with student retention (Pascarella and Terenzini “Informal”; Pascarella and Terenzini “Patterns”; Terenzini and Pascarella “Predicting”). Pascarella and Terenzini refine the previous studies by examining “how different educational outcomes were associated with different types of student-faculty interactions” and controlling for “the potentially confounding influence of the characteristics which students bring to college” (“Informal” 184). The results of the study are worth quoting at length. Pascarella and Terenzini investigated:

the relationship between student-faculty informal relationships and three freshman year educational outcomes [cumulative freshman

year grade point average, a measure of self-perceived intellectual development . . . and a measure of self-perceived personal development]. After controlling for the influence of 14 student pre-enrollment characteristics, such as high school academic performance, academic aptitude, personality needs, and expectations of certain aspects of college, eight measures of the frequency and strength of student-faculty informal relationships accounted for statistically significant increases in the variance in freshman year academic performance and self-perceived intellectual and personal development. (183)

In other words, high levels of student-faculty engagement improved cumulative freshman year GPA and students' perception of their intellectual and personal growth, and these levels were unaffected by various factors in the students' background. The students at Boise State who completed Stretch with the same instructor, although their pre-enrollment characteristics were not assessed, demonstrated the same positive impact in their cumulative freshman year GPA. And, as noted above, these students also returned to school at a significantly higher rate. Pascarella and Terenzini continue:

[T]he associations [between student-faculty informal relationships and educational outcome measures] are not totally explainable by the fact that the students whose initial intellectual abilities and personal dispositions lead them to seek actively non-classroom interaction with faculty, also tend to achieve at the highest levels academically and to benefit the most from college intellectually and personally. *Rather, it would appear from the present findings that the frequency and strength of student-faculty informal relationships may make a significant contribution to variations in extrinsic and intrinsic freshman year educational outcomes, independent of the particular aptitudes, personality dispositions, and expectations which the student brings to college.* (188, emphasis added)

Pascarella and Terenzini's study argues that the informal interaction influences students' academic performance and achievement without regard to student proclivities. In other words, the high level of student-faculty interaction positively influences students both academically and in terms of student persistence (retention) even for students who, according to their academic histories, are unlikely to seek out that kind of interaction. The benefits of

student-faculty interaction are not based entirely on student proclivity; it is to some extent the interaction itself that produces the beneficial effects. The results reported by Pascarella and Terenzini indicate that the outcomes experienced by Boise State Stretch students are not due to their already-existing abilities as students, but rather, at least in part, to the increased faculty-student interaction offered by the Stretch program.

Other scholarship in this area argues that increased student-faculty interaction has further positive implications. As Jean Endo and Richard Harpel note, “Beyond the opportunity it provides for students to obtain academically related information, increased student-faculty interaction has been shown to have a broader impact on students’ general ways of thinking, methods of problem solving, and interest in various life goals. Increasing interaction is also one way in which institutions, in an era of shrinking resources and declining student demand, might increase student satisfaction with specific programs. . .” (116). Our experience with the Stretch program suggests that with increased student-faculty contact, Stretch English 90 students in some areas—including average GPAs, retention rates, and overall satisfaction—out-perform students who begin their college careers in Mainstream English 90 and 101. These results encouraged faculty as we assessed how well we were using student fees, and as we looked to build our argument for creating a credit-bearing course for these students.

THE QUESTION OF CREDIT

Our experiences at Boise State demonstrate that the Stretch program, as Glau documented at Arizona State, is a powerful pedagogical tool. The faculty benefit from the second semester of work with the same students because they have more time to understand and respond to individual student needs. Students appear to benefit from the increased contact with the faculty both as writers and as students—the Stretch program significantly increases the likelihood that students will be registered at our institution the year following their completion of Stretch. The Stretch program also appears to have a positive impact on student GPA, and a blind portfolio assessment reveals that Stretch students are producing writing in the same range of proficiency as their mainstream counterparts. Both students and faculty report a very high level of satisfaction with the course, and the program itself is relatively simple to put in place through scheduling. However, in spite of these achievements, the department and college have consistently refused

to acknowledge that the Stretch program is worthy of recognition through catalog listing, which would help inform students and the public about our programs, or through granting English 90, in any form, credit-bearing status. Our arguments that these students are indeed working with language at levels that are significantly higher than students in other credit-bearing courses have thus far fallen on deaf ears.

The impact of the no-credit status is significant. As Judith Rodby points out, faced with a course's no-credit status, "student doubt persists—what's this for? If it were really worthwhile, it'd be worth something. So is it a trick?" (110). Closer to home, Katie White conducted a study of basic writers at Boise State that involved, in part, her participation as an intern in a Stretch section of English 90. As an intern, she attended every class and occasionally met with students outside class. She observed:

Students' concern with the no-credit status of the class verbally manifested throughout the course. Grumbling amongst themselves, the students made snide comments referencing the class as a "waste of time" and told stories of how they had tried to enroll in E101 . . . and had been denied. As the semester wore on, I began to notice a surprising thread of discussion in which the students constantly questioned if what they were doing and learning was going to be required in E101. They completed their writing assignments, always looking toward the next semester—when their work would count. (3)

White also distributed a survey to 217 students in the fall semester of 2007 in order to measure, among other things, the impact of basic writing's no-credit status on their impression of the course. The majority of students surveyed (143, or 66%) were not negatively influenced by the no-credit status of the course, but a significant minority (63, or 29%) *did* have a negative view of the course because of its no-credit status. These students resented the amount of work in basic writing (an amount equivalent to the other courses in the composition sequence) because it bore no immediate rewards. On the surveys, students commented that they "should focus on [their] main classes because they count more." They also questioned, "Why should we do the same amount of work for no reward in the end?" Finally, they argued, "It doesn't make sense to do all this work for nothing!" (45). Even the fact that, as White discovered in her survey of basic writing students at Boise State, 43.78% of students *chose* to take basic writing in order to increase their confidence

before entering English 101 has had little impact on the perception of English 90 by faculty outside of Composition (95). As we continue to try to change the status of English 90 by gathering data on student achievement, perhaps the data that many students demonstrate significant initiative by enrolling in this course will resonate differently with faculty.

In describing revisions to a basic writing program at California State University, Chico, Rodby addresses the problem of how basic writing is conceived, noting that she and her team “mainstreamed [their] students, and while [they] were doing so [they] found that the term ‘basic writing’ (or developmental or remedial writing) blocked [their] ability to produce wide-ranging and long-term changes in the ways in which [they] were able to conceive and give credit for writing instruction” (107). Rodby mainstreamed basic writing students not because of a reduced commitment to them, but rather because she “began to see that [the terms basic writing and remediation] were primarily institutional ‘slots,’ interchangeable terms for what the institution saw as one monolithic problem, and as a monolith, the category would not budge” (108). Rodby writes, “it did not matter whether we thought of and called the program remedial or basic or developmental writing. It did not finally even matter how relevant, insightful, or provocative our curriculum was,” and goes on to describe the puzzling, somewhat circular arguments she received from faculty and administration when she argued that these courses should be for credit (108).

Answering her own question of why “is/was there this insistence on no-credit writing courses,” a question that the Composition faculty at Boise State has asked repeatedly, Rodby provides “nostalgia” as the answer, and defines nostalgia as “an array of effects that disguise the economic relations and institutional functions served by basic writing. In this atmosphere, the multifarious contexts of real basic writing programs are reduced to a uni-dimensional picture of student lack, a disturbingly sad portrait of students who didn’t learn *something basic* that they should have before they came *here*” (108, 109).

Rodby’s use of the term nostalgia and its conceptual application to basic writing programs is far more complex than what I present here, but this aspect of nostalgia—that faculty outside basic writing programs tend to see basic writers as a unified group of students who are all similar in that they represent lack, and in so doing allow for the rest of the students at the university to inhabit a space of wholeness—is expressed in the arguments that we at Boise State have received in our repeated attempts to gain credit-bearing status for this course. The Composition faculty is, of course, pleased with the

results of the Stretch program, and grateful to be able to manage it on this small scale. As I note above, we intend to continue to work toward creating a credit-bearing basic writing course that will be more firmly institutionalized than it is in its current form. Academic institutions, however, do not move quickly. Our attempts to change the status of English 90, and even the creation of the Stretch program, have taken place over years. Once we have persuaded the faculty to make these changes, we still face challenges at the College, University, and State levels. Much in our institutions still depends on a fantasy of lack and the institution's apparent reliance on this marked category of other in contrast to which it can define itself as complete. Eric Clarke, analyzing heteronormativity and citing Raymond Williams, calls this kind of system—characterized by a privileged, entitled insider paired with a disempowered outsider—a “‘structure of feeling,’ one that aims to produce an entitled coherence” (6). It is this structure of feeling about entitled insiders and excluded outsiders that we confront when we discuss the needs of basic writers and basic writing programs. In significant ways, we may not be able to change this structure of feeling. Much of contemporary culture relies on this insider/outsider divide. Over time, however, we can create institutional structures such as credit-bearing courses that neutralize the outsider status of basic writers while we take care not to create new categories of the abject.

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Notes

1. Between 2002 and 2004, 85% of English 90 students earned a grade of C or better in English 101; 82% of students who enrolled directly in English 101 earned a grade of C or better.
2. Since the course numbers are (confusingly) the same for both Stretch and Mainstream English 90 and English 101, I refer in this article to Stretch English 90 and Stretch English 101 to indicate Stretch designated classes, and Mainstream English 90 and Mainstream English 101 to indicate classes that did not carry a Stretch designation.

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Appendix A

English 90 Fall Semester Assignments	English 101 Spring Semester Assignments
Personal Essay Autoethnography or Educational Narrative. Mainly a personal narrative (can include observation as a method).	Persuasive Essay Expansion of opinion essay; no emphasis on MLA citation. Can use sources; smooth integration of sources.
Observation Essay (optional essay).	Interviewing as a Research Strategy Profile Essay, or breaking out the interview piece of the Academic Discourse Community (ADC) essay.
Critical Analysis (Introduction to Academic Discourse) Photo Essay/ Analysis of literature, film, art, etc., or an Enhanced Reading Response. Perhaps some research, but not focused on research. The response should be written following academic rather than personal discourse conventions (can include observation as a method).	Research Essay Academic Discourse Community essay; can include a return to reflection on Personal Essay.
Opinion Essay “Going Public.” (This I Believe, The Arbiter, Letter to editor....). Opinion on something other than yourself.	Revisiting the Personal Essay Revise the Personal Essay to become part of the portfolio cover essay or the introduction to the ADC essay; exploration of where you are now as a writer.

Appendix B

Stretch Program Pilot Phase, 2005-2007 (percentages based on English 101 enrollments)					
	Enrolled Fall 2005 and 2006	English 101		English 102	
		Enrolled	Completed	Enrolled	Completed
Stretch English 90	120	120 (100%)	103 (86%)	71 (59%)	59 (49%)
Mainstream English 90	328	228 (79%)	198 (87%)	117 (51%)	95 (42%)
Mainstream English 101		3127 (100%)	2591 (83%)	2219 (71%)	1856 (59%)
English 90, Stretch and Mainstream	448	348 (78%)	301 (86%)	118 (54%)	154 (44%)

Stretch Program for All English 90 Students, 2008-2009 (percentages based on English 101 enrollments)					
	Enrolled Fall 2008	English 101		English 102	
		Enrolled	Completed	Enrolled	Completed
Stretch English 90	262	152 (58%)	139 (89%)	117 (77%)	Not Available
Mainstream English 101		2025 (100%)	1729 (85%)	1313 (65%)	Not Available

Appendix C

Course Outcomes

By the end of English 90, students will be able to

- a) have confidence in themselves as writers and readers within a college environment;
- b) engage in a multi-faceted process of writing, that includes invention, development, organization, feedback, revision, and editing/proofreading;
- c) be willing to use multiple strategies to view, revise, and edit their evolving written texts over time, moving from writer- to reader-based prose;
- d) produce writing that has a beginning, middle, and end developed with relevant details and examples;
- e) produce writing in a format appropriate to its purpose;
- f) read actively and critically and engage in a dialogue with a text;
- g) edit their work for mechanical errors to the extent that, while perhaps not “perfect,” surface features of the language do not interfere with communication.

By the end of English 101, students will be able to

- a) apply strategies for generating ideas for writing, for planning and organizing material, for identifying purpose and audience, and for revising intentionally
- b) produce writing in non-fiction, inquiry-based genres appropriate to the subject, context, purpose, and audience;
- c) integrate evidence gathered from experience, reading, observations, and/or other forms of research into their own writing in a way that begins to complicate their own understanding;
- d) use a variety of strategies for reading and engaging with a range of material;
- e) use an academic documentation style, even though they may not show mastery.
- f) revise to extend their thinking about a topic, not just to rearrange material or “fix” mechanical errors;
- g) articulate the rhetorical choices they have made, illustrating their awareness of a writer’s relationship to the subject, context, purpose, and audience;
- h) provide appropriate, engaged feedback to peers throughout the writing process;
- i) produce prose without surface-level convention errors that distract readers from attending to the meaning and purpose of the writing. (“First-Year Writing Program”).