

# Critiquing the Need to Eliminate Remediation: Lessons from San Francisco State

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*ABSTRACT: For more than two decades the California State University (CSU) has been trying unsuccessfully to “reduce the need for remediation” on its campuses, primarily through initiatives aimed at high schools. This article examines a basic writing reform project, San Francisco State’s Integrated Reading/Writing Program, in the context of the CSU’s history of remediation. The success of this project, in light of the CSU’s remedial past, provides the grounds to advocate for higher education as the appropriate location for basic writing and reading and to advocate, in turn, for the resources necessary to theorize, develop and sustain a rich variety of approaches to basic writing instruction. The analysis in this article also suggests the need for more graduate programs and faculty development initiatives to help prepare a new generation of basic writing teachers and scholars to meet the needs of the next new generation of basic writing students.*

*KEYWORDS: basic writing; reading-writing connection; remediation; institutional history; educational reform*

Ever since the California State University (CSU) first authorized remedial instruction in the mid-1970s, it has been waging an expensive, but losing, battle to eliminate the need for it. In the 1980s, students deemed to be in need of remediation (as determined by a system-wide English Placement Test) numbered somewhere around 42% of the incoming class. This, in turn, caused the California Postsecondary Education Commission to declare that remediation was careening out of control at California’s colleges and to call on the California State University and the University of California to prepare comprehensive plans for reducing the amount of remedial instruction at their institutions (California Postsecondary Education Commission, *Promises to Keep*).

The CSU Board of Trustees responded with a set of initiatives aimed chiefly at high schools to reduce the number of incoming first-year students who would need remediation to no more than 12% by 1990. Among other things, the CSU added four years of high school English to its admissions

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criteria, a requirement that at the time was even more stringent than that of the University of California. It also beefed up its teacher education programs with new minimum entry and exit requirements, including maintenance of higher grade-point averages, an “early field experience,” and more rigorous assessments of “professional aptitude” (California Postsecondary Education Commission, *Segmental Actions* 6). The plan included a 4.4 million dollar program to improve the clinical supervision of student teachers. And, in the event that this impressive array of high school course requirements and toughened standards for teacher credentialing did not help stem the tide of remediation, the CSU’s plan also called for a number of cooperative school-college partnerships to ensure that the high schools clearly understood what would be expected of students when they arrived at college. Among the chief results of these partnerships was the joint publication by the Academic Senates of the California Community Colleges, the CSU, and the University of California of the “Statement on Competencies in English and Mathematics Expected for Entering Freshmen.”

To ensure that the “Statement on Competencies” was not simply shipped out in the mail and forgotten, it was featured at a number of statewide and regional articulation gatherings sponsored by the CSU, the University of California, and the California Community Colleges. Also, it became the centerpiece of the High School Diagnostic Testing Program in Writing, sponsored in part by the CSU-funded California Academic Partnership Program. Starting in 1984, the Diagnostic Testing Program focused on 11th-grade students of underrepresented minority backgrounds, inviting them to write a “mock” CSU English Placement Test (or UC Subject A test) on which they would receive a score based on the university rubric as well as comments from university writing program faculty. These students were also invited to attend Saturday workshops on academic writing. CSU and UC faculty and high school teachers collaborated on the reading and scoring of the essays in the hopes that the high school teachers would adopt the university standards in their curriculum.

A story of the obstinacy of remediation emerges from these efforts, for while they were being put into practice, the percentage of CSU incoming students who needed remediation in English (as determined by the English Placement Test) was steadily creeping upward to an all-time high. By 1990, the year the CSU had set as its goal to reduce the need for remediation in English to no more than 12% of the incoming class, 45% were assessed as needing remediation, and that figure was climbing.

Undeterred by this failure, or as Mike Rose put it in “The Language of Exclusion,” suffering from the institutional amnesia endemic to higher education when it comes to writing instruction, a new Board of Trustees decided in 1997 to mandate yet another set of initiatives to reduce remediation to no more than 10% of the incoming class by 2007. Following in the footsteps of the City University of New York, which banned remedial instruction from CUNY’s four-year colleges and moved it -- as well at the students deemed in need of it -- to its two-year community colleges, the CSU plan called first for a one-year limit on remedial instruction in English and mathematics available to any given student. Students who failed to complete their remedial course work during their first year were subject to disenrollment from the university. Disenrolled students would be able to return to the university only after completing their remedial course work at a community college. The second, more ambitious, part of the plan called for a ten percent reduction each year in the number of students entering the CSU who were in need of remediation, putting the State University system finally on track for eventually eliminating remediation from its campuses.

I open with this brief history because, as Mary Soliday argues in *The Politics of Remediation*, basic writing suffers from a lack of historical consciousness that renders it vulnerable to efforts to eliminate it. This is especially dangerous because “proponents of downsizing often rely upon a particular version of the remedial past to bolster their arguments in the present” (10). Far too often, concerns about curriculum, pedagogy, and basic writing theory are left out of administrative policy discussions about remediation. Just as often, however, scholars and teachers in the field of basic writing are content to ask questions only about curriculum and pedagogy while ignoring basic writing’s complex history and the ways it interacts with vested institutional, economic, and political interests. In the remainder of this article, I provide an update on San Francisco State University’s Integrated Reading/Writing (IRW) program. By locating the IRW reform project in the context of the California State University’s history of remediation, I am better able to question these vested interests, most notably the institutional need to claim that remediation is being eliminated.

## **THE INTEGRATED READING/WRITING PROGRAM**

As Helen Gillotte-Tropp and I first reported in our 2003 article in the *Journal of Basic Writing* (Goen and Gillotte-Tropp, “Integrating Reading and Writing”), San Francisco State’s Integrated Reading/Writing program devel-

oped in response to two concerns directly related to the CSU's latest attempt to reduce the need for remediation. The first was that substantive reductions to the population of students who test into remediation would threaten CSU access and equity goals.<sup>1</sup> The second was that efforts to eliminate remediation are implicitly linked to a persistent tendency in literacy education to treat reading and writing as distinct and separate processes. Postsecondary institutions have stubbornly enacted policies based on the belief that learning to read should have been accomplished by third grade, and learning to write by twelfth. Accordingly, there remains a prevailing attitude at many institutions that any postsecondary instruction in reading and writing is *de facto* "remedial," and, thus, vulnerable to political and educational forces aimed at its removal.

Even if we hadn't faced these remedial policy imperatives, we had good reasons to want to integrate instruction in reading and writing. Informed by lessons from the past, we knew that students were systematically placed into basic writing classes disproportionately on the basis of the reading portion of the CSU's English Placement Test, regardless of the fact that these courses may offer little or no instruction in reading. We were also convinced by empirical research demonstrating the crucial connection between learning to read and learning to write. Sandra Stotsky summarized this research as follows: better writers tend to be better readers, better writers tend to read more than poorer writers, and better readers tend to produce more mature prose than poorer readers (16). We knew that particular kinds of reading experiences, for example, Mariolina Salvatori's "introspective reading" (446), have a stimulating and generative effect on writing, and, as Vivian Zamel notes, the corollary is also true: particular writing experiences teach students to be more effective readers (470).

We took seriously as well Kathleen McCormick's warning that when reading and writing are taught as separate subjects, these beneficial effects are all but lost (99). Since reading instruction has historically had no place in the postsecondary curriculum—and basic writing instruction a rapidly diminishing place—we could only wonder how at-risk students were to successfully negotiate the literacy tasks that await them in college. And, while some of the research findings on the reading-writing connection have informed instructional practice, Nancy Nelson and Robert Calfee remind us that instruction itself is still far from integrated, but is rather "a collection of separate components, each with its own traditions, theoretical underpinnings and terminology" (36). By way of example, they cite the "integrated language arts" teacher who teaches students about "main ideas" when teach-

ing reading, but refers to “topic sentences” when teaching writing without pointing out, or perhaps even noticing, any overlap (35-36).

Our reasoning in designing the IRW program was fairly straightforward: if the link between instruction in reading and writing is as crucial as we hypothesized, then it follows that students would reap demonstrably greater benefits from an approach that integrates the two. And if this hypothesis proved true, we wondered if students deemed least prepared for college-level reading and writing could also achieve these benefits effectively and swiftly enough to enable them to move into the academic mainstream in less time than the one-year institutional limit on remedial instruction. Could we, in other words, eliminate the “need for remediation” by providing students with an enriched literacy experience during their first, crucial year of college?

The IRW program provides an alternative to San Francisco State’s traditional approach to English remediation. Students who scored in the lowest quartile on the English Placement Test (two levels below first-year composition) used to complete a full year of developmental-level course work. In their first semester, they took a 3-unit basic writing course concurrently with a 1-unit reading course. In their second semester, they took another 3-unit basic writing course concurrently with another 1-unit reading course. To meet this remedial English requirement, students had two different writing instructors, two different reading instructors, and four different groups of classmates by the time they entered their first-year composition course in their third semester of enrollment. The curriculum of the reading and writing courses was mostly separate. The texts students read in the reading course, and the strategies they learned to guide their reading, were rarely used in the writing course. Similarly, the topics students wrote about in the writing class and their growing understanding of the writing process and of discourse structures were not explicitly used to help students decide how and what to read in the reading course.

Rather than requiring students to complete two basic writing classes concurrent with two reading classes before becoming eligible for first-year composition, the IRW program (like Arizona State’s *Stretch Program* [see Glau]) enrolls them in a single year-long course; students who successfully complete this course will have met not only the CSU remediation requirement, but also the first-year college composition requirement, in effect completing in one year what would ordinarily have taken three semesters to accomplish.

In 1999, Helen Gillotte-Tropp and I began working with five instructors to develop an integrated curriculum (for more specific information on the

IRW course, see Goen and Gillotte-Tropp; Baldwin, Gillotte-Tropp, Goen-Salter, and Wong). During our deliberations and planning, we realized that in order for our course to be truly integrated, it could not be a course in which reading always precedes writing, reducing writing to something that is done after the reading is complete as a way to check comprehension rather than a way to work through, analyze and arrive at an understanding of a text. Neither could it be a course that reduces reading to a supporting role, one that provides information and lends authority to bolster the writing.

Accordingly, a primary goal of the IRW course is to provide students with an explicit understanding of the complex ways that reading and writing intersect, to make visible to them the choices they make as readers, and how those choices inform the decisions they make when writing, and vice versa. At some point in the reading of any text, students are asked to examine the text not just for what meaning they derived from it, but for how the author constructed the text and the effect of those formal decisions on how students made sense of the text. In short, the course tries to break down the barrier between text reception and text production, by inviting students to look at a text they read for clues to its production, and a text they produce for clues to how it might be received.

Helping students attain awareness and knowledge of their own mental processes such that they can monitor, regulate, and direct themselves to a desired end are key components in the IRW curriculum. The course accomplishes this through a variety of self-reflective activities. For example, at various junctures, students write a modified version of Mariolina Salvatori's difficulty paper. In the IRW version of the difficulty paper, students are asked to explore in writing their surprises, hunches, puzzlements, and difficulties with a reading, to articulate an action plan for how to address those difficulties, and then put that action plan to work. In the final part of the assignment, students reflect on any new insights they gained, or new questions that arose, as a result of putting into action their strategic plan. They also reflect on the efficacy of their plan, how well it worked to guide them to a different, perhaps more satisfying, experience with the text. Finally, students consider how their experiences as readers, as recorded in the difficulty paper, might inform decisions they make as writers. We have found that the difficulty paper teaches students to become conscious of their mental moves and to revise or complicate those moves as they become aware of what those moves did or did not make possible, thereby encouraging recursion and self-monitoring in both reading and writing. Perhaps most importantly, this assignment makes "difficulty" a generative force in student learning,

something to be critically engaged rather than avoided or ignored. And we have discovered it helps create important bridges between academic learning and students' lived experience in the world beyond school as they discover that their experience with reading is shaped not only by the formal properties of a text or their comprehension and interpretive skills, but also by their social and cultural location.

Our intent in designing the IRW curriculum was not to radically alter the content of either the basic writing or reading course, but to re-design the curriculum so that what students learned about reading would function as an explicit scaffold for learning about writing, and vice versa. By necessity, we created some new writing topics to correspond to texts assigned in the reading class, and we added some new readings to help students think through topics assigned in the writing class. Otherwise, our emphasis was not on curricular change so much as it was on strategic double-duty—using what had traditionally been considered reading heuristics to aid students in the act of writing, and using writing strategies to help students better understand their roles as readers.

One example of a strategy that we use extensively is K-W-L+. It represents a four-step procedure that begins by accessing students' prior knowledge, explicitly attaching new learning onto what students already know (K). We then invite students to ask questions. Given what they know, what would they like to know (W)? What curiosities do they have or what puzzlements would they like to explore? Teachers then introduce a learning activity, which can be anything from reading a text, watching a film, listening to music, looking at visual stimuli, to analyzing data collected as a class. The next step is to gather what they've learned (L) from the activity. Which of their questions got answered? How has this new learning amplified or modified what they knew before? In the final stage, students pose new questions (+). Given what they knew, and what they have now learned, what new questions do they have or what new avenues of inquiry would they like to explore? While K-W-L+ has traditionally been considered a reading strategy only, we have found it to also be an excellent idea-generating strategy for writing essays. Students brainstorm and generate categories for ideas (K), develop interests and curiosities by asking questions (W), write on what has been learned (L), and use this as a guide for additional reading and inquiry (+), which can then form the seeds of a new writing project. As used in the IRW program, K-W-L+ is a strategy that students can use to not only comprehend a text, but to shape and organize ideas for a written product, and finally, use in peer response groups to give or receive feedback

(what do I know about my peer's essay? what do I want to know about my peer's essay? what did I learn from reading my peer's essay? what do I still want to know now that I've read my peer's essay?). Through instruction and experience in using strategies such as K-W-L+, the IRW program instills in students a sense that reading and writing are complementary processes of meaning making—whether meaning comes from their transaction with text or their production of text.

Bolstered by their direct experience with the reading-writing connection, students are encouraged through a series of reflective activities to consider how reading and writing work reciprocally to help them discover meaning, not only in the IRW course, but in courses across the college curriculum, and in their own lives. And, we added a powerful incentive: Students who successfully complete the IRW course have met not only the CSU remediation requirement, but also San Francisco State's first-year college composition requirement, in effect completing in their first year what would ordinarily have taken them three semesters to accomplish.

We began by piloting 5 experimental sections of the IRW course. Then in 2001, with a three-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), we expanded to 10 sections and an enrollment of 169 students. In 2002-2003, we offered 11 sections with 190 students, and in 2003-2004, we again offered 11 sections and enrolled 193 students. At the conclusion of the grant, the program expanded to include over 30 sections enrolling more than 500 students.

## **PROJECT RESULTS**

To measure how well the IRW program was meeting its goal to provide students with an enriched literacy experience that would facilitate their entry into mainstream college courses, we used a number of outcome measures to compare students enrolled in the IRW program to a control group enrolled in the traditional sequence of separate reading and writing courses. In our 2003 article (Goen and Gillotte-Tropp), we published results on the first year the program was funded by FIPSE. These first-year results showed that students in the IRW group had higher retention rates, completed the remediation requirement sooner and in greater numbers, scored similarly to or higher on measures of reading comprehension and critical reasoning, received higher ratings on their writing portfolios, and exited the program better able to pass the next composition course in the required sequence. More importantly, the IRW group was able to accomplish these goals in one

semester less of instruction than students in the control group. We noted at the time that while these first-year findings painted “a promising portrait of literacy development, the extent to which the integrated program can prove to be a viable response . . . will be more fully determined by corroborating data from the second and third years” (109). As described below, the results from the first year held steady over the next two years.

### **Retention Rates**

Many students enrolled in the IRW program work full or part time, come from families with low incomes, and/or have family responsibilities caring for younger siblings or their own children. In designing their “Enrichment” program at CUNY,<sup>2</sup> Mary Soliday and Barbara Gleason noted that “forming communities is vitally important” for under-prepared students (66). The IRW program, with its year-long cohort structure, provides a place on a large urban commuter campus for students to form a community of peers and provides vital skills and strategies to help students negotiate this crucial first year. Students enrolled in the IRW program had retention rates of 88% in the first year, compared to 83% for students in the traditional sequence. In the second year, IRW retention had increased to 90%. By the third year, the IRW retention rates improved to 94%, while the rate for the traditional sequence remained relatively stable at around 85% over this same two-year period.

### **Remediation Pass Rates**

Across all three years of FIPSE funding, the IRW students passed the integrated course at a higher rate than students in the traditional two-semester sequence of remediation. These higher pass rates have significant consequences in the context of the CSU’s one-year limit on remediation. The penalty for not passing the remediation requirement in the first year is dis-enrollment from the university. Each year between 1997, when the remediation rule went into effect, and 2007, the CSU as a whole had on average dis-enrolled 11% of its first-year students. In the first three years of the remediation rule, San Francisco State dis-enrolled 16%; after the IRW program was implemented, that percentage decreased to an average of slightly more than 12%. In the third year of the IRW program, 99% of students in the IRW course passed (and thereby met the CSU remediation requirement). By comparison, 89% of the students in the traditional sequence passed,

leaving 11% subject to dis-enrollment under the CSU policy. Table 1 shows a comparison of remediation pass rates across all three years.

**Table 1**  
**Comparison of Remediation Pass Rates, IRW v. Control**

<b>Year</b>	<b>IRW</b>	<b>Control Group</b> (n=221)	<b>Percent Difference</b>
2001-2002	<b>97%</b> (N=136, n=132)	<b>84%</b> (N=204, n=173)	<b>+13%</b>
2002-2003	<b>97%</b> (N=171, n=166)	<b>87%</b> (N=212, n=184)	<b>+10%</b>
2003-2004	<b>99%</b> (N=181, n=179)	<b>89%</b> (N=221, n=201)	<b>+10%</b>

### **Reading Comprehension and Critical Reasoning**

To assess reading outcomes, we used the Descriptive Test of Language Skills. The DTLS is a widely used and reliable measure of reading comprehension and critical reasoning. Scores from the DTLS are normed against those of an ethnically diverse sample of students enrolled in regular and developmental courses, including a proportionate number of ESL students, from 11 two-year colleges and 24 four-year colleges across the U. S. As shown in Table 2, between 2001 and 2004, students in the IRW courses performed similarly or showed significantly higher gains on both the reading comprehension and critical reasoning measures. At least as important, the IRW students achieved these gains after one semester of instruction, compared to the control group whose gains were assessed after one year. See Table 2.

### **Essay Portfolios**

We collected essay portfolios from both groups of students. The portfolios contained essays from students in the IRW group collected during the first semester (one essay from early in the first semester, one from the mid-point, and one towards the end of the semester). These portfolios were labeled “Developmental-level” and compared to portfolios from the control group (one essay collected early, one at mid-point, and one near the end of the year of the traditional two-semester sequence of developmental courses).

**Table 2**  
**Summary of DTLs Posttest Results, IRW v. Control**

		<b>IRW Group</b>	<b>Control Group</b>	<b>Difference Between Groups</b>	<b>Significance of Difference</b>
<b>Reading Comprehension Mean Score</b>	Year 1: 2001-02	29.20	27.0	2.20	<b>0.005</b>
	Year 2: 2002-03	28.78	27.57	1.21	<b>0.038</b>
	Year 3: 2003-04	28.43	28.73	-.30*	<b>ns</b>
<b>Critical Reasoning Mean Score</b>	Year 1: 2001-02	20.2	18.6	1.6	<b>0.002</b>
	Year 2: 2002-03	19.41	18.62	0.79	<b>ns</b>
	Year 3: 2003-04	18.90	19.85	-0.95*	<b>ns</b>

\* These inverse figures for Year 3 are not entirely surprising. By the third year, the traditional reading course had come under heavy influence of the IRW program. In fact, most of these traditional courses were taught by instructors who readily conceded that they approached their traditional courses in much the same way as they approached their IRW courses.

We also collected three essays from the IRW group during the second semester of the integrated course. These portfolios were labeled “First-Year Composition (FYC)-level.” These portfolios were compared to those collected from the control group during their third semester, when they were enrolled in the first-year written composition course.

The portfolios were assessed in blind and normed scoring sessions using two independent raters (any discrepant scores were resolved by a third independent reader). Experienced external readers assessed each portfolio using a modified version of the checklist used by Soliday and Gleason in their “Enrichment” program (“From Remediation to Enrichment”). Portfolios were assessed on a four-point scale across six subcategories, and were given an overall rating (see Appendix). Over the three years, students in the IRW

group consistently outperformed the control group, but with varying levels of statistical significance. In the interest of space, Tables 3 and 4 summarize the comparative results for the first and third years only.

**Table 3**  
**Year 1 (2001-2002) Student Essay Portfolios, IRW v. Control**

	<b>Measure</b>	<b>IRW Group</b>	<b>Control Group</b>	<b>Difference Between Groups</b>	<b>Significance of Difference</b>
<b>Developmental-Level Mean Score</b>	1. R/W Integration	2.71	2.68	0.03	<b>ns</b>
	2. Thesis	2.69	2.58	0.11	<b>ns</b>
	3. Org	2.65	2.59	0.06	<b>ns</b>
	4. Syntax	2.67	2.50	0.17	<b>0.05</b>
	5. Mechanics	2.47	2.30	0.17	<b>0.05</b>
	6. Audience*	n/a	n/a	n/a	<b>n/a</b>
	7. Overall	2.71	2.51	0.20	<b>0.01</b>
	<b>First-Year Comp Level Mean Score</b>	1. R/W Integration	3.05	2.8	0.03
2. Thesis		2.82	2.65	0.11	<b>ns</b>
3. Org		2.8	2.76	0.06	<b>ns</b>
4. Syntax		2.69	2.57	0.17	<b>ns</b>
5. Mechanics		2.48	2.50	-0.02	<b>ns</b>
6. Audience*		n/a	n/a	n/a	<b>n/a</b>
7. Overall		2.83	2.59	0.24	<b>0.044</b>

\* In Year 1, we used an evaluation checklist with only six measures. The checklist was modified in Years 2 and 3 to include the measure "Audience Awareness."

**Table 4**  
**Year 3 (2003-2004) Student Essay Portfolios, IRW v. Control**

	<b>Measure</b>	<b>IRW Group</b>	<b>Control Group</b>	<b>Difference Between Groups</b>	<b>Significance of Difference</b>
<b>Developmental Level Mean Score</b>	1. R/W Integration	2.73	2.64	0.09	<b>ns</b>
	2. Thesis	2.75	2.51	0.24	<b>0.0045</b>
	3. Organiz.	2.66	2.47	0.19	<b>0.042</b>
	4. Syntax	2.52	2.26	0.26	<b>0.005</b>
	5. Mechanics	2.82	2.50	0.32	<b>0.0011</b>
	6. Audience	2.82	2.74	0.08	<b>ns</b>
	7. Overall	2.74	2.46	0.28	<b>0.0011</b>
<b>First-Year Comp Level Mean Score</b>	1. R/W Integration	2.7	2.5	0.2	<b>ns</b>
	2. Thesis	2.8	2.6	0.2	<b>ns</b>
	3. Org	2.6	2.6	0	<b>ns</b>
	4. Syntax	2.5	2.5	0	<b>ns</b>
	5. Mechanics	2.9	2.7	0.2	<b>ns</b>
	6. Audience	2.9	2.8	0.1	<b>ns</b>
	7. Overall	2.8	2.6	0.2	<b>ns</b>

### **Second-Year Composition Pass Rates**

Students who successfully complete the year-long IRW course have met two of San Francisco State's written English proficiency requirements. They have not only complied with the one-year remediation rule, but also have met the first-year composition requirement and are now eligible to enroll in the mandatory second-year composition course. Since students coming out

of the IRW program arrive in this second-year course a full semester earlier than of students in the control group, we were especially interested to see how the IRW students fared in this second-year course. As Table 5 shows, across all three years, students who arrived in the second-year course via IRW passed the course at consistently higher rates than students who arrived by other pathways.

**Table 5**  
**Comparison of Pass Rates in Second-Year Composition\***

	<b>Year 1: 2001-2002</b>		<b>Year 2: 2002-2003</b>		<b>Year 3: 2003-2004</b>	
<b>Pass Rates of Students Eligible via IRW</b>	N=76	<b>97%</b> (n=74)	N= 124	<b>93%</b> (n= 115)	N= 181	<b>95%</b> (n=172)
<b>Pass Rates of Students Eligible via Traditional Pathways</b>	N= 1967	<b>90%</b> (n=1740)	N= 1964	<b>88%</b> ( n =1728)	N= 1883	<b>92%</b> (n=1732)

\* We compared pass rates in second-year composition of students from the IRW program to aggregate pass rates of students who arrived in second-year composition by a) testing directly into it; b) testing into and completing first-year composition; c) testing into and completing the traditional remedial sequence followed by successful completion of first-year composition; or d) transferring in coursework equivalent to first-year composition from a community college.

Taken as a whole, the evidence seems clear. The IRW program allows students deemed most at-risk for not succeeding and/or dropping out, who begin San Francisco State with a full year of high-stakes remediation as their welcome mat, to enter the academic mainstream during the crucial first year and to move on to more advanced composition courses—in short, to thrive as college students.

## **ELIMINATING THE NEED FOR REMEDIATION**

During the time that the IRW program was being implemented, the clock was steadily ticking on the CSU's policy to reduce the need for remedia-

tion to no more than 10% of the incoming class by the year 2007. In 1997, when the reduction plan went into effect, 47% of all incoming first-year students were assessed as needing remediation in English. Not unlike the initiatives in the 1980's, this new plan called for comprehensive strategies, most of which were aimed at creating joint partnerships between the CSU and public schools to strengthen the preparation of high school graduates. One strategy introduced in 1999 was the Collaborative Academic Preparation Initiative (CAPI), a partnership between various CSU campuses and local high schools, whose purpose was to strengthen the mathematics and English preparation of college-bound high school students. When the CSU eliminated funding for this program, it was replaced in 2003 with a new flagship initiative, the Early Assessment Program (EAP). Jointly administered by the State Board of Education, the California Department of Education, and the California State University, the Early Assessment Program's goal is to identify students not yet proficient in English before they arrive at a California State University campus.<sup>3</sup> The aim is to identify these students by the end of their high school junior year, and then provide them with an amplified course of instruction in their senior year, thus relieving the CSU of the need to remediate these students in their first year of college. Since it was first put into practice, the number of high school students volunteering to take the EAP has grown to more than 300,000 in 2007 alone.

Two primary initiatives accompany the EAP plan. The first is an 80-hour course of study for high school teachers called Reading Institutes for Academic Preparation (RIAP). The stated goal of these reading institutes is to help teachers "learn the expectations for college-level work in English . . . and practice specific strategies for building academic reading competency . . . including content-specific reading demands, critical thinking, and academic reading/writing connections" ("Pilot Study" 6). More than two thousand high school teachers have participated in these reading institutes since their inception.

The second initiative is the twelfth grade Expository Reading and Writing Course (ERWC). Developed in collaboration with CSU faculty and high school teachers, it consists of fourteen assignment modules. Each module contains a sequence of "integrated reading and writing experiences" that take between two to three weeks to teach (7). High school teachers are offered four days of professional development led by CSU faculty, high school teachers, and county office of education language arts specialists. Since the introduction of the ERWC in 2004, more than 2,200 teachers have partici-

pated in these workshops and adopted the ERWC modules for students in their schools.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that these efforts are doing much good, that many students are finding higher education accessible as a direct result of the collaborative efforts of dedicated university and high school teachers. And I would argue that increased collaboration between high school and university faculty is having a beneficial effect on both, providing a forum for a rich exchange of ideas, expertise, and resources, not to mention professional support and encouragement. But offered as a comprehensive plan to reduce the need for remediation, these strategies belie the historical record. In implementing this expensive EAP initiative, the CSU is operating from a persistent but flawed belief that if it only sets its standards high enough, and articulates them clearly to the secondary schools, the result will be fewer under-prepared students seeking admission and, eventually, complete elimination of the need for remedial courses at the university level. Despite these well-intentioned and well-implemented programs in the high schools, in 2007—the target year for reducing the number of new students needing remediation to 10%—the remediation figures for that year remained at the recalcitrant rate of 46.2%.

In light of these disappointing results, the CSU has looked for alternative ways to reduce educational spending on remedial programs, most directly by declaring that as of 2007 there would be no more general funding for remediation. Campuses across the CSU were in a tough bind: they would receive no more general funding to support basic writing, yet they would be admitting just as many students as ever in need of these programs. Initially, the San Francisco State administration was considering two options in lieu of continuing to fund the almost \$700,000 annually to provide remedial instruction in English. The first option was to remand all remediation to the College of Extended Learning (where SFSU houses its program of adult continuing education courses); the second was to outsource remedial instruction to the community colleges. Of these two plans, the San Francisco State administration preferred the former, despite the prohibitive premium students would have to pay to register for these courses through Extended Learning (\$220 per unit compared to regular full-time tuition of \$127 per unit); some other CSU campuses have opted for the latter option—sending students in need of remediation to the community colleges.

Around the time of these budget deliberations, the IRW program began to receive national and statewide attention<sup>4</sup> for its documented success and its cost effectiveness,<sup>5</sup> and the San Francisco State administration saw

a solution to its problem. Gone were the extended learning and outsourcing plans, and in their place the IRW program became fully adopted and was approved as a first-year composition equivalent course, permanently replacing the traditional sequence of separate developmental-level reading and writing courses. As of 2006, all incoming first-time students who score at the remedial level on the English Placement Test (approximately 1,100 each year) enroll in a credit-bearing integrated reading/writing course in a vastly expanded IRW program.

## **HISTORY LESSONS**

We can take many lessons from this story. The most obvious one is that despite institutional efforts to say it isn't so, many students will continue to arrive on college campuses deemed under-prepared to engage in the various literacy practices of the university.<sup>6</sup> I'd like to argue for a different lesson though, one that more directly calls into question the institutional need to claim that remediation is being eliminated. If we accept this need as a realistic one, we subscribe to the amnesiac logic that better efforts might eventually yield the as-yet elusive result of a high school graduating class in which all students are adequately prepared for college-level reading and writing. Instead, I suggest we read this history to critique the fundamental notion that college remediation is a problem in need of a solution.

On the homepage of the California State University website, the CSU describes itself in bold letters as "a leader" in both accessible and high-quality education. Obscured in this claim is the fact that remediation sits at the intersection of these twin goals, between the democratic ideal of equal educational opportunity on the one hand, and high academic standards on the other. In my search through two decades worth of policy documents, I saw repeated instances where higher education in California has tried to have it both ways, to authorize remedial programs in the name of equal educational opportunity even as it calls for elimination in order to preserve high standards. As institutions of higher education perform this delicate balancing act, expensive efforts to reduce remediation, however unsuccessful they might be, serve the institutional need to convince state legislatures and the tax-paying public that democratic ideals are being met, while reassuring them that their dollars are not being wasted teaching students what they should have learned in high school. As long as remediation sits at this intersection, institutions like the CSU will need initiatives such as the Early

Assessment Program. While they may fail to reduce the need for remediation, as public policy they succeed perfectly.

In a certain sense, the success of the IRW program embodies this dilemma. On the one hand, the insoluble problem of how to curtail remediation created the opportunity that gave rise to the IRW program. On the other hand, the IRW program offered a face-saving solution to the dismal results of the CSU's latest efforts to reduce remediation. The IRW program maintains access for students who would otherwise be sent elsewhere, and it helps them successfully negotiate the literacy values and practices of the university while mitigating the risk of dis-enrollment. It does so without any obvious erosion of academic standards, as measured by comparative pass rates in the second-year composition course, and it does so in a cost effective way. But it also suggests that if we cease to think of remediation as a problem to be solved, and think of it as an opportunity to practice what Soliday refers to as "translation pedagogy"—if we envision first-year courses where students can negotiate the discourses they bring with them to college and those they will encounter across the university curriculum—then the problem of remediation goes away (17).

## **NEW POSSIBILITIES**

Imagine what could happen if the CSU embraced this reading of its remedial past. No longer would it have to invest millions of dollars trying to get high schools to perform a function that is, by necessity, rooted in the college experience. To perform its democratic function, basic writing sits not at the point of exit from high school, but at the *entry* point to higher education. Historically, basic writing has served to initiate students to the discourses of the academic community, which may be far distant from and even alien to those of their home communities.<sup>8</sup> But basic writing doesn't just initiate students to a more privileged language; it also offers them the opportunity and instructional practice to critically reflect on a variety of discourses, of home, school, work and the more specific public discourses of the media, the law, the health care system, and even of the college writing classroom itself. By reading its history this way, the CSU could stop playing the elimination game and argue instead for its campuses as the appropriate location for basic writing instruction. If the CSU ceased having to claim that it can reduce remediation in order to justify the existence of its basic writing programs, it might also be persuaded to dedicate sorely needed funding for faculty development and two- and four-year college partner-

ships commensurate to what it currently earmarks for programs like the EAP. Without doubt, one of the biggest challenges basic writing faces is a woeful lack of graduate programs to help prepare new generations of basic writing faculty. California has 109 community college campuses, serving some 2.5 million students. The University of California stopped offering remedial instruction in English back in the 1990s, and now with more CSU campuses following suit, these community colleges have already become the primary site for basic writing instruction. A majority of the thousands of basic writing classes offered on community college campuses in California are taught by instructors who receive their graduate degrees from a CSU campus. In California, a discipline-appropriate master's degree is the minimum qualification to teach at a community college. According to the American Association of Community Colleges, more than 70% of full-time community college faculty nationwide have terminal master's degrees. Given that there are so few master's programs in composition and/or programs that focus on teaching basic writing, it's safe to presume that these instructors most likely have degrees in English or related fields, but not necessarily in composition, let alone basic writing. Noting a study indicating that only "20% of institutions nationwide reported requiring full-time faculty to possess specific training in developmental education before teaching remedial courses," the California Community Colleges are developing strategic plans to recruit and hire faculty who are both "knowledgeable and enthusiastic" about teaching basic writing and who "choose to teach remedial classes as opposed to being assigned to them." They even went so far as to cite a study recommending that any instructor who teaches a remedial-level course should possess a terminal degree in a discipline relevant to developmental education (Center for Student Success 20).

This faculty recruitment goal, however laudable, is sure to be hamstrung, for even though an important mission of CSU graduate programs is to prepare California community college teachers, only a handful of the 23 CSU campuses (3 by my latest count) offer a true MA degree in composition (or comp/rhetoric), and an equally small number offer graduate coursework, in teaching basic writing. Even fewer of these already-too-few graduate courses offer any preparation in teaching postsecondary reading.

With FIPSE funds, the IRW program intended, albeit modestly, to help fill this gap through a series of regularly scheduled workshops to prepare San Francisco State and local community college faculty to teach IRW courses. We also videotaped the workshops for use with new teachers in San Francisco State's graduate teacher education program. While these workshops provided

a venue to exchange ideas, we quickly learned that teaching integrated reading/writing is not something that even experienced teachers can absorb in one or two half-day workshops. Accordingly, we made several modifications to our approach to faculty development. To help prepare new faculty to teach integrated reading/writing, my colleague Helen Gillotte-Tropp and I created a year-long graduate seminar (“Seminar in Teaching Integrated Reading/Writing”) as part of the San Francisco State’s MA and graduate teaching certificate programs in Postsecondary Reading and Composition. Since we first began offering this graduate course in 2002, we have seen more than twenty community college instructors, representing some fifteen different campuses, come to our campus to take the course so they could begin to develop integrated reading/writing courses at their home institutions.

While these new efforts are helping to prepare basic writing teachers who live or work in close proximity to the San Francisco State campus, they remain hampered by certain constraints. A typical sabbatical leave for community college teachers is a single semester only, so they cannot feasibly complete a year-long course of instruction. For those not on leave, it is very difficult to take graduate courses while teaching full-time. As such, our efforts have fallen well short of meeting this growing need, even at this very local level. But if the CSU could read its history to legitimize the place of developmental English in the higher education curriculum, it might authorize new and expanded graduate programs to help prepare a new generation of community college faculty “knowledgeable and enthusiastic” about teaching basic writing and reading. Since it’s not likely that graduate education alone can meet the challenge of preparing a new generation of faculty or effectively address the needs of already-degreed community college teachers, the CSU might also offer similarly comprehensive faculty development programs and collaborative partnerships between community college and university faculty similar to the ones it currently provides in the Early Assessment Program, perhaps something along the lines of the California Writing Project, but directed towards community college teaching.

My goal in this article is not merely to wish some utopian vision on the California State University. Rather, it is to raise historical consciousness by using the story of San Francisco State’s IRW program to critique the particular ways the California State University has institutionalized basic writing. This is a local example, admittedly, but one I hope sheds light on more global challenges facing basic writing. I hope we can find in this story the grounds to advocate for higher education as *the* appropriate location for basic writing and to advocate, in turn, for the resources necessary to theorize, develop, and

sustain a rich variety of approaches to basic writing instruction—instruction that might justifiably focus on reading as well as writing. I hope as well that we use this story to call for more graduate programs and faculty development to help prepare a new generation of basic writing teachers and scholars to meet the new basic writing students who will inevitably continue to arrive on our college campuses.

## Notes

1. While not necessarily the case at all institutions, at San Francisco State, basic writing is inextricably linked to ethnic and cultural diversity. As recently as 2007, two-thirds of all African American, Mexican American, and “other Latino” students admitted to the CSU placed into remedial English. Over the last decade, African American students have consistently placed into remedial courses at higher relative percentages than any other group (CSU Division of Analytic Studies).

2. Not coincidentally, the Enrichment program at City College of New York was embedded in its own institution’s effort to eliminate remediation. Despite its documented success, the program was fatally compromised when the CUNY Board of Trustees and the New York State Board of Regents voted to eliminate remediation in the system’s senior colleges, housing it exclusively on the two-year college campuses as part of a new master plan that created a tiered system, not unlike ours in California. See Gleason for further details.

3. Developed in 2001, the EAP identifies not-yet proficient high school students by their scores on an expanded California Standards Test in English (augmented by the addition of 15 multiple choice items and an essay, both of which are retired items from the CSU English Placement Test).

4. In addition to being awarded the FIPSE grant, the IRW program has also been the recipient of the 2005 Conference on Basic Writing Award for Innovation, and at its Spring 2005 meeting, the California State University English Council passed a resolution designating San Francisco State’s IRW program as a model to be used throughout the CSU system. At the January 2008 meeting of the CSU Board of Trustees, the IRW program was cited as an example of “effective practices” that provide an alternative to remediation.

5. Because students who successfully complete the IRW course do not have to take the mandatory first-year composition course, the university can offer as many as 50 fewer sections per year of first-year composition. San Francisco State's traditional three-semester progression from Developmental Writing/Reading through first-year composition carried an annual cost of \$672,100. The year-long IRW program reduces that annual expenditure to \$286,000, for a net savings of \$386,100.

6. One could also question the validity of the English Placement Test. If significant reforms to the high school curriculum appear unable, both historically and currently, to budge the percentage of students placing into English remediation, then perhaps the test is assessing skills that are of an altogether different nature than what even the most rigorous and comprehensive high school courses are teaching. I leave that critique for another day.

7. I make this claim aware that BW's initiation function is a contested one. See for example, Bizzell, Harris, Horner and Lu, and Soliday.

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**APPENDIX**  
**PORTFOLIO EVALUATION CHECKLIST**  
**San Francisco State University**  
Integrated Reading/Writing Program

Portfolio Number \_\_\_\_\_

Reader Number \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions to Readers:** Each portfolio contains three essay “sets” written by the same student, one written near the beginning of the term (but not a diagnostic), one written near the mid-term, and one essay written near the end of the semester. Read through each portfolio, then considering the body of work **as a whole**, complete the following checklist. For each category listed below, place a check mark clearly on one point of the 4-point rubric. Based on your evaluation, please also indicate as **“Category Seven”** whether you think the portfolio indicates that the student has met the learning objectives of the course and is eligible to proceed to the next level course. Completing the space for comments on the portfolio as a whole is encouraged, but optional.

**Category One: Formulating/Supporting a Thesis**

The writer has a clear purpose/controlling idea/thesis that is supported by thoughtful analysis. The complexity of ideas is recognized and the thesis is substantiated through personal insights and appropriate references to assigned or chosen texts.

\_\_\_\_ 4

Above Average

\_\_\_\_ 3

Average

\_\_\_\_ 2

Below Average

\_\_\_\_ 1

Poor

**Category Two: Organization**

The writer makes appropriate organizational choices. Paragraphs are coherent internally and the writer uses transitions between paragraphs. Introductions and conclusions function purposefully within the text.

\_\_\_\_ 4

Above Average

\_\_\_\_ 3

Average

\_\_\_\_ 2

Below Average

\_\_\_\_ 1

Poor

**Category Three: Sentences**

The writer writes sentences that are both well-focused and employ a variety of syntactic structures such that he/she is able to develop ideas at the level of the sentence, rather than by mere accretion of sentences.

___ 4	___ 3	___ 2	___ 1
Above Average	Average	Below Average	Poor

**Category Four: Grammar and Mechanics**

The essay is well-proofread and mainly free of significant errors in usage, spelling, and mechanics.

___ 4	___ 3	___ 2	___ 1
Above Average	Average	Below Average	Poor

**Category Five: Reading/Writing Integration**

The writer is able to use readings to inform his/her understanding and discussion of the topic. The writer comprehends the texts he/she reads (that is, he/she is able to distinguish between major [gist] and minor [evidentiary] propositions of the texts) but also evaluates and employs textual information to inform his/her own discussions/arguments.

___ 4	___ 3	___ 2	___ 1
Above Average	Average	Below Average	Poor

**Category Six: Audience Awareness**

The writer shows a conscious awareness of the reader's needs. The writer orients the reader by employing word choice and tone appropriate to his/her purpose and audience (for example: providing background information in the introduction and defining or modifying key terms.)

___ 4	___ 3	___ 2	___ 1
Above Average	Average	Below Average	Poor

**Category Seven: Overall Evaluation**

**Meets Learning Outcomes** \_\_\_\_\_

**Does Not Meet Learning Outcomes** \_\_\_\_\_

**Comments:**