

School Name West Virginia Northern Community College, Wheeling, WV

Course Name College Literacy (Integrated Reading and Writing)

Course Format Hybrid, blended

Key Results From fall 2014 to spring 2015, 91 percent of students who completed the developmental literacy course using MySkillsLab received a passing grade of A, B, or C, and were able to move on to take College Composition.

Submitted by
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Course materials
The Effective Reader/Writer by Henry; MySkillsLab

Setting

West Virginia Northern Community College (WVNCC) is a public, two-year institution with an annual enrollment of fewer than 5,000 students. Its three campuses serve six counties in the Northern Panhandle of West Virginia. The main campus in Wheeling is semi-urban in an otherwise rural setting. Low-income first-generation college students make up 80 percent of the student population.

About the Course

As part of a statewide effort to redesign developmental education to increase the number of college degree holders and meet future workforce needs, WVNCC initiated a pilot redesign of its developmental reading and writing sequence in fall 2013. The course was launched officially in fall 2014. To help accelerate students through developmental education, one level of reading (4 credits) and one level of writing (3 credits) were condensed into one 16-week, 5-credit integrated reading and writing (IRW) course entitled College Literacy. Placement in the course is determined by Compass reading and writing exam scores. If a student meets or exceeds the cut score on only one exam, they must still enroll in the course, because literacy skills are incredibly important for success in college.

Of the students enrolled in College Literacy at WVNCC, less than 25 percent are coming directly from high school. Forty percent are ages 20-35, and the remainder are displaced workers of all ages. Our annual course enrollment on all three campuses is about 180. Sections are capped at 20 students to ensure each student has access to a classroom computer.

College Literacy is designed to develop students' critical reading and academic writing skills. The course blends traditional lecture, discussion, and activities with a web-based curriculum to supplement classroom instruction at a 50/50 split. Class meets twice a week for 140 minutes each day. The physical classroom space is designed to match the blended course format. At the back of the room there is a computer for each student; at the front of the room are tables for discussion and lecture. The course is graded as A, B, C, or R (re-take). Students registering for College Literacy must also register for a one-credit "First Year Seminar" course that teaches college success skills.

Challenges and Goals

Given my experience in successfully redesigning developmental writing courses at Eastern Gateway Community College in Ohio, I was brought in to help redesign the new integrated reading and writing course at WVNCC. It was my goal to create a redesigned course with consistency across sections, mastery learning, and uniformity of assessment, as these elements had not previously been in place. To cater to the hybrid/blended course format, we needed to include a digital solution that would:

- Address accountability for our institution with standardized assessments and learning goals.
- Meet students' varying skills levels.
- Provide students with several opportunities for learning, re-learning, and mastering.
- Enhance learning with a variety of assignments to help blend computer lab time with traditional classroom work.

Based on my previous success redesigning with MyWritingLab, I chose to implement MySkillsLab across all sections to match the West Virginia IRW curriculum.

“I tell my students: ‘You are in charge of your grade.’ If they don’t get a question correct the first time, they have an opportunity to learn from their initial failures, access help, and try again.”

Implementation

We require MySkillsLab in all sections and use a coordinator course for consistent content delivery.

Students complete MySkillsLab exercises to strengthen skills in grammar and mechanics, skills in reading, and skills in online discussions. MySkillsLab work is often started in class but finished outside of class. Students can take advantage of an open computer lab on campus with tutors available. Due dates for MySkillsLab work are listed in the syllabus rather than set in MySkillsLab. There is some flexibility with the completion of topics. However, I do want students to keep up with what is being taught in class, and I constantly work with my students to help them develop good time management skills.

It has been a challenge to teach a condensed curriculum; we now move from sentences to paragraphs to essays in one semester. It has also been a process for us to decide what to assign in MySkillsLab, what to omit, and what to teach in class. MySkillsLab is a valuable tool, but it is important, for both students and instructors, to find a good balance in the amount of content that is assigned.

I currently assign ten topics from the following Handbook modules: Identify and Correct Sentence Errors; Write Effective Sentences, and Use Punctuation Correctly. I have kept everything at the default setting with the exception of removing the Write Drafting exercises. I do set prerequisites in the MyLab, and I require that students achieve a 70 percent on the Apply exercises before they can take the post-test.

Students have two attempts to take each topic post-test. If they need it reset a third time, it is conditional upon a student-teacher conference. For accountability, post-tests are password-protected and unlocked by the instructor in class, or by a tutor or test proctor in the computer lab. The Mastery Check post-diagnostic in MySkillsLab counts as the final exam for the course.

I upload all my PowerPoints and handouts into Document Sharing, and students can easily access and print out material if they wish. Students also complete weekly discussion threads in MySkillsLab as part of their grade.

I add offline items to the gradebook in MySkillsLab to keep track of all assessments for the course. Everything I enter falls into the existing quiz, test, homework, or other categories.

Assessments

40 percent	Essays (3); paragraphs; MySkillsLab topic post-tests (10); MySkillsLab Mastery Check
35 percent	In-class assignments and homework; MySkillsLab weekly discussion threads
25 percent	Quizzes, Socratic seminars (4), response essays (2)

Results and Data

In fall 2014, the completion rate of ten topic post-tests in MySkillsLab was 90 percent, and the average score on completed post-tests was 79 percent. It’s fantastic to see students take their MySkillsLab work seriously. I believe that students respond well to the policies I set, including attendance incentives, conditional re-sets, and conferencing.

For those students who don’t withdraw, success rates for the course are phenomenal (Figure 1). In fall 2014 and spring 2015, 91 percent of students who completed the course received a grade of A, B, or C.

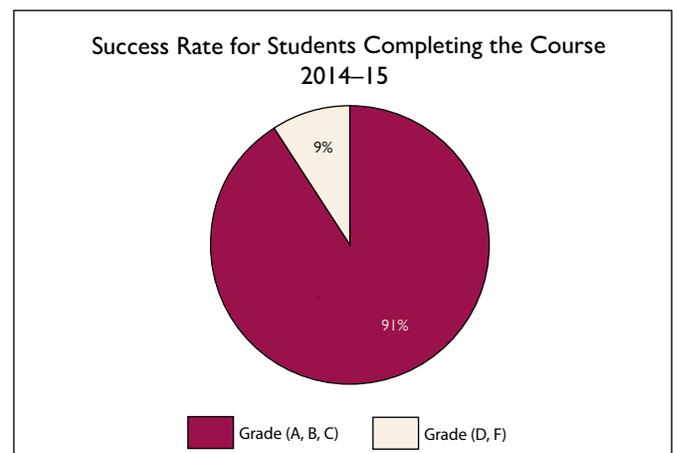


Figure 1. Success Rate for Students Who Completed Professor Cable’s College Literacy Sections, Fall 2014 and Spring 2015, (N=66)

Retention is a challenge with which we are still struggling. Students often just disappear. In the 2014-15 academic year, twenty percent of my initial headcount did not complete the course. I have been keeping track of the reasons students leave and have concluded that it is not due to the curriculum, the MyLab, or the teacher. Our students are frequently dealing with personal, familial, health, and work issues outside of school that lead them to drop, withdraw, or simply not finish the course. This is a nationwide issue that needs to be addressed.

The Student Experience

The instant grading and feedback provided by MySkillsLab allows me to hold students more accountable for their learning. I often tell my students: “You are in charge of your grade.” If students don’t get a question correct the first time, they have an opportunity to learn from their initial failures, access help, and try again. The program keeps students moving forward. Here are some quotes from students enrolled in College Literacy this semester:

- “I like MySkillsLab. I like that I had an unlimited amount of time to do the work and post-tests. I really feel that helped me to understand.”
- “Working with the MySkillsLab was very helpful because I was able to do the things my instructor taught me. I feel it was a great way to practice what I was taught in class.”
- “The thing I liked the most about MySkillsLab was the help and videos at the beginning of each section. The PowerPoints and handouts gave extra insight into what was being taught. I also liked being able to see what was shown in class on the site. This was an immeasurable tool [teacher-loaded handouts and class materials].”
- “I enjoyed using Pearson’s MySkillsLab this semester in my English class. The positive features I liked on MySkillsLab were the multiple attempts on activities which made it easier to learn and fix my mistakes. I also liked being able to view PowerPoints shared by my teacher.”

Conclusion

We are now looking at different ways to help students by-pass or accelerate developmental education. We currently offer a free, self-paced “Fast-Track” program for motivated students who want to attempt to test out of developmental reading, writing, or math courses on their own. The majority of students have used this option to test out of developmental math, but we also offer an integrated reading and writing version for students who choose to go this route.

In the fall of 2015, I will pilot a different course using MySkillsLab for students who test at the high end of the cut score on the Compass exams and could potentially do well in Composition with just a little bit of “brush-up.” I plan to front-load grammar work, reading, and study skills in the first five weeks of the semester so that students can re-test on the Compass at the end of five weeks. If they place out of developmental English, we will have a Composition course ready for them to move directly into for the last ten weeks.

Implementation and results case studies share actual implementation practices and evaluate possible relationships between program implementation and student performance. The findings are not meant to imply causality or generalizability within or beyond these instances. Rather, they can begin to provide informed considerations for implementation and adaptation decisions in other user contexts. For this case study, mixed-methods designs were applied, and the data collected included qualitative data from interviews, quantitative program usage analytics, and performance data. Open-ended interviews were used to guide data collection.