

Introduction: Why FYC Teachers’ Perspectives Are Important

First-year math and English courses at community colleges have become sites of contestation. Community colleges in the United States are the first (or the last) point of entry for the majority of students to access higher education, a career, a new start, and new skills. Community colleges have also become the entry point for many international students into U.S. higher education. Since the 1960s, a focus on higher education access for the traditionally disenfranchised has been paramount in the mission of community colleges (Shaughnessy, 1977). Today, community colleges are seeing a shift in emphasis from access to completion. In efforts to ameliorate what has come to be known as a “leaky” pipeline—the path from remedial and developmental courses to first-year composition (FYC) and degree, transfer, or certificate completion—colleges have trimmed their remedial and developmental education curriculum, combining FYC courses with separate but concurrent support courses or increasing class time to add support components to the traditional FYC. In many community colleges, FYC serves as the last English course students take toward the associate’s degree; this same course is often articulated (see Glossary) with university and four-year college FYC classes. This book explores teacher, researcher, and curricular responses to changes in the traditional FYC course.

Community College FYC Trends: Eliminating Remedial Pre-Requisites

Current higher educational policy, often introduced as educational reform, has made radical changes in student placement protocols, college funding schemes, and course delivery mechanisms. Where community colleges once held the goal of providing educational access to

students with a wide range of goals, the focus now is on having students complete a course of study, accelerating students through English and math requirements.

The rise of big data and advanced statistical analysis has, in some ways, led the charge that community colleges could do things differently, accelerate course-taking patterns, and get better results for students. Here, results, or “student success,” are typically understood as students: (1) getting through (passing) a course and (2) transferring or finishing a program, certificate, or degree. Much of the data collected on completion of higher education considers a six-year cycle. By 2017, 31.5 percent of students who first enrolled in a community college in the United States in 2011 had transferred to a four-year college or university; of those, 42 percent completed a bachelor’s degree in the six-year span (Shapiro et al., 2017). It is assumed that students who neither transferred nor completed an associate’s degree had dropped out, but little information is available to track students’ actual reasons for dropping out.

Jaggars and Stacey (2014) have re-characterized the remediation problem as one of students leaving the community college:

Only 28 percent of community college students who take a developmental education course go on to earn a degree within eight years [while for non-remedial students the figure is 43 percent] and many students assigned to developmental courses drop out before completing their sequence and enrolling in college-level courses. (p. 1)

Current research suggests that it is not necessary to know the exact reasons for dropping out, however, since data shows that in colleges where remedial classes have been removed and replaced with accelerated FYC and Math sequences, student success rates (getting students through English and math classes) are compelling (Kolodner 2017; Mejia, Rodriguez, & Johnson, 2019).

This movement has further been justified by a concern with increasing equity for all students. Researchers note that remedial education

affects the poor and traditionally disenfranchised groups, including ethno-racially minoritized students, more egregiously:

Underrepresented student groups are overrepresented in developmental courses. Eighty-seven percent of both Latino and African American students enroll in developmental education, compared to 70 percent of Asian American and 74 percent of white students. Among low-income students, 86 percent enroll in developmental coursework. (Mejia, Rodriguez, & Johnson, 2019, p. 3)

In community colleges, success toward equity means closing the “leaky pipeline” from which low-income students and students of color are more likely to be lost.

Statistical data show that students are less apt to drop out and more likely to stay in school if the trajectory to college-level courses is immediate (Mejia, Rodriguez, & Johnson, 2019). In other words, eliminating courses that are not at the college level can shorten the time it takes to transfer or get an associate’s degree because students get through their required courses for transfer more expediently. An example of the new wave of thinking in community colleges is California, where in 2017 the California State Legislature passed a bill, AB 705, that has nearly eliminated English placement testing for incoming students (a noted exception is in English for Speakers of Other Languages) and mandates that students who want to transfer to a four-year institution finish FYC within the first year of their arrival at the community college (California Community Colleges, 2018).

One question is how English departments decide which model is the best for their department. Several models have been put forth (e.g., Adams et al., 2009; California Acceleration Project, n.d.), and colleges have latitude as to which method they choose to implement to accelerate their students. The main models include having a support class, either credit or non-credit, attached to a FYC course designated for learners who need the support or offering a single FYC class with more unit hours for those learners who need support.

There is to date little information on how faculty collaborate to change pedagogy and make informed curricular decisions. In our experience, most departments do not have a set method to work through the difficult decisions of curricular change, something we hope will change. Furthermore, because of the differential ability or differential will for colleges to accomplish research and collaborate with faculty on areas of common concern, institutional research might not give the whole picture of what is happening at a particular college or in a particular department. Anecdotally, more students seem to fail and have to retake FYC now that remedial and developmental education classes have been removed. Yet, because of how data is collected, reported, and used, in some schools the view is that if the student finishes FYC successfully within a year, failing the first time can be viewed as successful through the lens of “one-year throughput.” Still many questions remain to be answered about the effects of placement and FYC reforms on both students and faculty:

- Are those students who actually need support taking the appropriate class?
- How does being in a class where they are struggling affect students?
- When a department is recognized as successful at accelerating students, what are the curriculum and student learning outcomes that the department agrees upon?
- Are students assessed equitably or just passed on?
- How do students feel about the expectations that are set for them?

Many states are decreasing funding to higher education and seeking ways to get more economic “value” from public higher education (Selingo, 2018). One way they are doing this is through curriculum and placement reforms. Although the curriculum at community colleges is perceived as the purview of faculty, state legislatures and college chancellors’ offices have mandated curriculum reforms and offered financial

incentives to colleges to get more students through a course of study (transfer, certificate, or degree) more quickly. Furthermore, additional funding can influence how well-positioned a department is to implement successful curricular changes. A recent webinar hosted by the RP Group (2020) on acceleration and co-requisite models described one college's accelerated FYC program as adding a credit unit to its core FYC course and mandating a two-credit unit for-credit support course; the amenities allotted by the FYC accelerated curriculum also included embedded note-takers (a person in the class taking notes for those students who are unable to do so), embedded tutoring (one or more tutors who assist students during the class), and embedded counseling staff (a counselor who is associated with the class and provides academic counseling for students), as well as faculty support groups that focused not only on creating and continuing collaborative work on new pedagogy but also collective support for faculty emotional health. All of these support structures add to the cost of running the course and require additional preparation and time on the part of instructional faculty. We suspect there is a new burden on faculty teaching accelerated FYC and wonder how this kind of teaching differs from teaching other FYC courses.

College for All: Ramifications for FYC

All of these reforms are occurring alongside changes in the student population enrolled in community college FYC courses. At the same time that there has been a sharp decline in the numbers of students going to college (Hechinger Report, 2018), especially in urban areas with record (pre-pandemic) low unemployment rates such as the San Francisco Bay Area (Johnson, Mejia, & Bohn, 2015), and a drive for a more educated populace in the face of a future robotized workforce and stagnant wages (Lennon, 2018), there has been a push for English faculty to make curricular changes in their FYC courses to accommodate a wider range of students, including those whose placement test scores, in the past, might have placed them in remedial or developmental education. Faculty, therefore, find themselves faced with changing their curriculum to

accommodate a broader range of students but still mandated to achieve the same student learning outcomes and the demand that the course follow articulation agreements with four-year institutions.

Indeed, it is not clear just how diverse the community college student body is. At the 2019 California Association for Postsecondary Education and Disability meetings, statewide professionals expressed concern over the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office reported data on the AB705 accelerated curriculum as it relates to students with disabilities: The student data was not disaggregated by disability category, thus ignoring the range of disabilities that include students who may only need accessible furniture to those with intellectual disabilities and autism spectrum disorders, as well as students who are blind/partially sighted, deaf, or hard of hearing. It was noted that data that is not disaggregated for specific disabilities gives an incomplete picture as it does not consider the differing needs and supports of students in divergent disability categories, which, if appropriately referenced, could, at the very least, mandate more funding and differentiated funding across districts (Rachel Goodwin, personal communication, 2019). In a prescient warning on how changes in remedial education—that is, ending remedial education—can affect community college instruction, W. Norton Grubb (2013) writes: "...the heterogeneity of students, which is one of the unique aspects of community colleges, may be too much for instructors in basic skills courses to handle. Accordingly, developmental education programs need to provide additional diagnostic and support mechanisms for students with learning disabilities and mental health problems" (p. 213). This would also affect the new accelerated FYC classes.

Community College FYC in Society

Despite many campuses' ongoing struggle to fulfill their missions, U.S. community colleges continue to be places of personal transformation and, ultimately, societal transformation. Increasingly, this transformation is occurring within what some see as a neoliberal perspective—one goes to college to become trained, find a career, and make money from

that career (Kroll, 2012). The student is a customer focused on getting in, getting through, and getting out. Colleges actually recommend websites where students can look into annual salaries for particular career choices (for example: <https://salarysurfer.cccco.edu/SalarySurfer.aspx>). Community colleges are increasingly seen as a direct way to train young adults to be part of the new economy. However, in a society where the new economy is more uncertain when it comes to jobs that have been the focus of a typical community college curriculum, how can ongoing change be incorporated into the curriculum, particularly for FYC and English?

We note that community college FYC is a place of complex ideological disagreement. Discussing how student knowledge gained from a community college FYC course transfers to other courses across the curriculum, Howard Tinberg (2015) writes that

beyond the stated purpose of offering students instruction in generalized writing skills (essentially a command of grammar and mechanics and mastery of the essay form, as well as some experience in writing with sources), the first-year composition course, some have argued, should give students a localized knowledge set that transfers to, and can be repurposed for different contexts, whether in history, sociology, chemistry, criminal justice, and so forth. (pp. 7–8)

Considering the current multiple purposes of transferable FYC courses, students' various purposes in taking the course, and the increasingly diverse student body that attends community colleges, is it still appropriate or possible to consider a cohesive set of skills that transfer to different contexts? Many of us are teaching FYC within departments that offer limited English course offerings focused primarily on teaching students to write coherently, cohesively, and engagingly without the benefit of writing across the curriculum courses (WAC) in other departments. We continue to wonder about the outcomes of these program structures: What actual skills do students learn in FYC courses? Will they be competitive if a four-year degree is their ultimate college goal? Will they be able to succeed in completing a job application and writing a convincing and coherent cover letter?

The community college system is unique in that it provides various pathways for students to gain job skills: “In an era when a college credential seems necessary for middle-class jobs and achieving the American Dream, increasing numbers of students are being pushed, or counseled, toward college as the only route to individual advancement” (Grubb, 2013, p. 1). However, for many students, the road for college advancement has been blocked because of “the remediation problem” (Grubb, 2013, p. 1) that starts in primary and secondary education; this is a problem that has evolved, according to Grubb, because of “passing along students who are not ready for the next level of schooling—something that generates the high numbers of students requiring remediation at every level” (p. 214), including the community college. The accelerated movement is thought by some to provide a more equitable pathway for ethno-racially minoritized students to pursue a college degree precisely because of the importance of that degree in U.S. discourse. We cannot underestimate the statistical evidence that those who have a college degree in the U.S. lead a better life, not just due to salary, but in part, due to health care benefits (Case & Deaton, 2020). Case and Deaton also note the changing workplace and economy, suggesting that higher education needs to be nimble and innovative as “there is obviously nothing in a bachelor’s degree that insulates the holder against being replaced by a machine or outcompeted by cheaper labor in the rest of the world” (p. 258). Certainly, curricular innovation should be continuously occurring in the community college, and we believe that the chapters in the book provide both the steps and vision toward innovation and how FYC faculty could be the foundation and source for change.

Among the 1,047 public community colleges in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2017), there is wide variability from state to state as to how they are run, what kinds of classes and programs they offer, and whether their courses articulate to four-year degree programs. Since the 1960s, following closely on the heels of the civil rights movement, a focus on access for the traditionally disenfranchised has been paramount in community colleges’ missions. Today, for many of these schools, the focus is on equity through retention and transfer (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015), and FYC plays a key role in that

effort. As Bailey, Jaggars, and Jenkins (2015) see it, changing the face of FYC is a way to improve student retention rates.

With this focus on student completion, the FYC course has been the subject of FYC faculty meetings, curricular and funding changes, grant projects, and policy changes. California made a major change to its community college FYC policy in 2009, requiring all students who wanted an associate's degree in any subject, including career and technical education, to take and pass the FYC course rather than a course one level below FYC but still transferable for college credit (Morse, 2019). Despite that change, there seems to be no research on how the change in the sequence for an associate's degree affected the way the course is taught or the number of students getting a degree, or even how it may have affected teacher burnout or attrition. Considering the aims of FYC and its articulation with four-year colleges, many FYC faculty were alarmed at the 2009 change, which Morse noted sparked a "contentious debate" (2019, p. 1). These teachers saw the move as a reification of one form of academic literacy, rather than a change to help students complete career technology education degrees where other types of literacies might be more appropriate. In 2009, many FYC faculty wondered how it would be possible to teach a FYC course that was both articulated with the four-year university system and useful to students in career and technical education. How could a single course address all students' diverse goals and needs? Why should students who wanted an associate's degree in a subject such as culinary arts, welding, or carpentry need to complete FYC?

Curricular changes in English programs have left some community college faculty wondering if education is no longer the primary goal for community college English classes (Kroll, 2012). Questioning the role that community colleges will play in the future, Kroll notes the difficulties of a neoliberal approach to education and quotes humanist philosopher Martha Nussbaum: "Distracted by the pursuit of wealth, we increasingly ask our schools to turn out useful profit-makers rather than thoughtful citizens. Under pressure to cut costs, we prune away just those parts of the educational endeavor that are crucial to preserving a healthy society" (quoted in Kroll, 2012, p. 119). Still, faculty are

innovating and radically transforming their pedagogies and the ways that students learn, hoping that their course is not “pruned” because of budget restrictions and lack of student enrollment.

Why This Book Now?

Although common sense (and actual community college policy) dictates that faculty are at the heart of the curriculum and that changes made to the curriculum should emanate from faculty, recent reforms at U.S. community colleges have in many ways bypassed full faculty involvement. The reasons why FYC faculty are not always the first to be consulted and included fully in FYC curriculum changes are complex and unique to each state and college. The reasons why they might not respond even when a call for a broader consultation is issued are also complex. Changes in class offerings and curriculum are often made without any documented qualitative data such as close examination of student writing, observations of classroom instruction (or a comparison of FYC instruction before acceleration and after the implementation of accelerated sections), teacher and student interviews about the quality of student work, teacher interviews about how they are changing their curriculum, or even interviews with transfer institutions that accept the new FYC classes as equal to previous ones. Often, college administrators and state legislatures focus on accountability through college completion rates and student pass rates rather than the learning that occurs in the classroom.

This book was born when we were each working in different sectors in public education and thinking about the changes in FYC in our respective contexts. It is an effort to bring grassroots faculty perspectives back to the curriculum, showcasing faculty knowledge, expertise, and creativity in designing and implementing excellent instruction in FYC. The range of topics grew out of an open call for manuscripts on community college FYC; we also invited authors working in this area. The book covers themes integral to current FYC teaching: faculty-driven innovative curriculum and creative programs that change the face of FYC, faculty expertise in literacy and in teaching a broad range of

students, and current research on community college policy and practice. We believe that faculty creativity and innovation must be part of all curricular change, and we hope that this book fosters a creative, collaborative dialogue among English faculty and other disciplines in the community college, focusing on student success and needs while also allowing faculty across disciplines full discretion toward creating programs of excellence.

In honoring teachers' creativity, experience, and knowledge, this book is an inquiry with teachers into community college FYC pedagogy and policy at a time when change has not only been called for but also mandated by state lawmakers (in some cases, backed by philanthropic foundations with interests in community college education, cf. Harklau et al., 2019) who hold the purse strings for public education.

Overview of the Book

The chapters in this volume, organized into four areas of concern for FYC teachers, are authored by a diverse group of community college instructors and researchers across the United States. Their range of perspectives provides a broad look at contemporary community college FYC that inspires teaching and learning and, at the same time, endeavors to present the complexity of community college FYC in higher education. The book focuses on pedagogy and policy/research, both of which are essential to the work of today's community college faculty.

Part 1: Refining Our Pedagogy

The four chapters in this part offer teachers new lenses through which to view their current pedagogy and provide sound practices for teaching FYC in traditional or accelerated formats. In "Negotiating Writing Identities Online and in Person: The Growth of Metacognition and Writing Awareness in FYC" (Chapter 1), Brenda Refaei and Ruth Benaender focus on student agency and the construction of a writer's identity as crucial to FYC students and their writing development. Refaei and

Benander provide reflective writing activities for students that support students' agency and efficacy within the writing classroom and beyond.

Considering the importance of reading skills for academic writing development is next as Michael Larkin outlines the ways in which technology can both help and hinder student learning in "They Are Reading from Screens, But (How) Are They Reading from Screens?" (Chapter 2). Although 21st century youth may be glued to their smartphones, they have not necessarily developed strategies for understanding and retaining what they read in electronic modes. Larkin provides creative approaches to help students identify their purposes and processes for reading in the FYC classroom and outlines pedagogy for different approaches to reading on screens versus print reading.

In "The Socio-Cognitive Approach in Academic ESL Composition Classes" (Chapter 3), Barbara A. Auris uses a socio-cognitive framework for student dialogue about writing that acts to empower English language students while also focusing on the basics of good instruction such as modeling, metalinguistic conversations, and practice to ensure student success in FYC.

Concluding this part, Miriam Moore presents an approach for engaging with student writers at any level through texts that focus on writing in "Using 'Writing about Writing' Pedagogy with L2 and Developmental Readers and Writers at the Community College" (Chapter 4). Through this approach, FYC teachers can provide a framework to help students develop metalinguistic knowledge and an academic writing practice that includes key threshold concepts such as the writing process, revision, and literacy practices.

Part 2: Teaching Toward Acceleration

The three chapters in this part focus on pedagogical practices currently playing a role in many accelerated classrooms. In "Contract Grading as Anti-Racist Praxis in the Community College Context" (Chapter 5), Sarah Klotz and Carl Whithaus describe the practice of contract grading and provide evidence for its transformative value in the FYC classroom.

Traditional student success is re-examined through the lens of the grading contract, a change that allows student agency; students consider their course responsibilities with competing demands on their time outside of school and also develop a sense of themselves as responsible for their efforts in the class.

Next, Andrew Kranzman and Chandra Howard focus on how FYC instructors can incorporate community-building activities to engage students in the classroom learning community. Their chapter, “First-Year Composition: Building Relationships to Teach Emerging Writers” (Chapter 6), provides ways for teachers to build trust within the classroom while supporting cognition and developing academic literacy.

Caroline Torres brings her expertise in learning disabilities and working with English learner community college students to “Supporting English Learners with Disabilities in College Composition Courses” (Chapter 7). Torres’s work clarifies how scaffolding writing assignments can be both engaging and efficacious. Her chapter reminds faculty that the reasons why students are struggling are complex and that planned, clear instruction can make the curriculum accessible for all.

Part 3: Considering Programmatic Change

In many community colleges, programs have been created to address students’ personal and career needs. The chapters in this part examine ways that three colleges have developed FYC programs and pedagogy to meet specific student goals. Two chapters focus on technical writing and literacy pedagogy, and the third describes a distance learning program that allows high school students in remote locations to access college FYC before completing their secondary school degrees.

In “Teaching Writing in a STEM Learning Community: The Heart and Science of Communication” (Chapter 8), Gonzalo Arrizon presents a structured approach to teaching FYC with a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) focus. Because he recognizes that FYC students need more than a science- and mathematics-based FYC curriculum to succeed in a STEM learning community, he created a

supportive curriculum that provides a humanities perspective on how STEM concepts fit into students' lives and dreams.

Next, Kellyanne Ure, Kade Parry, and David A. Allred highlight a distance learning program with an innovative approach to dual (concurrent) enrollment that they designed and taught. Their chapter, "Motivating Students from Afar: Teaching English in a Live Broadcast Concurrent Enrollment Program" (Chapter 9), features a model for student success from "afar" that includes synchronous video instruction assisted by onsite class facilitators with regularly scheduled teacher visits to the rural schools. Key to the success of the program was the work faculty put into the design, reworking, and assessment of the program.

This part closes with an in-depth look at how an English class can provide students with the writing curriculum necessary to respond to the demands of CTE (Career and Technical Education) professional writing and can motivate and invigorate students and teachers toward a CTE degree and certification completion. "Contextualized FYC Courses for Career Technical Education" (Chapter 10), by Erin B. Jensen, Jennifer Stieger, and Whitney Zulim, focuses on the ways that CTE English courses act as a reminder that the rigor of college writing is not just for students intent on transfer, but also for those following through with career and technical education.

Part 4: Considering Curriculum: Research and Policy

The six chapters in this part present different approaches to researching issues in FYC instruction, student success, and educational policy. Two chapters (11 and 16) focus on large-scale statistical research to better understand the needs of diverse student populations and suggest ways to achieve more equitable outcomes for community college students. Chapter 12 uses a case study ethnographic approach to understand Korean international students in FYC while Chapter 13, using a similar approach, focuses on educational reform undertaken in one English department. Chapters 15 and 16 analyze teacher interview data to understand how educational reforms affect the teachers as well as the curriculum.

Rebecca M. Callahan, Catherine E. Hartman, and Hongwei Yu, in “Heterogeneity among Community College English Learners: Who Are Our ELs in FYC and How Do They Compare?” (Chapter 11), present new analyses of how students who use English as an additional language engage both academically and socially in community colleges. Their work shows that the English learner population is not monolithic and points to the importance of engagement in college persistence rates.

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork focused on Korean international students at a community college in Utah, Justin G. Whitney points out the significance of community colleges for middle-class international students who have been shut out of four-year universities at home and in the U.S. His chapter is titled “Avoiding the ‘Cliffs’: Korean International Community College Students and Rhetorical Flexibility” (Chapter 12).

George C. Bunch, Ann Edris, and Jylie Alisa Kenner, in “First-Year Composition Faculty in a Changing Community College Policy Landscape: Engagement, Agency, and Leadership in the Midst of Reform” (Chapter 13), address ways that an English department faculty responded to educational reform directives affecting their programs. The chapter details the steps that faculty took to create instructional change.

Heather B. Finn and Sharon Avni based their chapter, “Combining Developmental Writing and First-Year Composition Classes: Faculty Perspectives on How Co-Requisite Teaching Affects Curriculum and Pedagogy” (Chapter 14), on interviews of faculty in New York teaching an accelerated FYC class. The authors show how the faculty negotiate reform while teaching the new models of FYC, becoming what Finn and Avni term “educational policy brokers.”

In “Valuing Teacher Knowledge, Valuing Local Knowledge: FYC in Hawai‘i Community Colleges” (Chapter 15), Meryl Siegal focuses on FYC change seen through the lens of community college faculty perspectives. The research analyzes interviews with teachers in FYC programs that were undergoing both curriculum reform and changes in student placement protocols. The faculty responses demonstrate that despite a curriculum in flux and questions on how changes were made, teachers remain engaged, creative, and visionary.

The final chapter in Part 4, “Institutional Research (IR) and Remediation Reform: A Contextualized Exploration for Faculty” (Chapter 16), is authored by Terrence Willett, Mallory Newall, and Craig Hayward, all of whom are currently engaged in community college institutional research. Their chapter allows English instructors an inside look at what campus Institutional Research (IR) offices do and how institutional researchers can effectively work alongside and with faculty on policy and pedagogical issues.

The volume concludes with our reflections and thoughts for future work, followed by questions for discussion and reflection and a glossary. We hope that the research and pedagogical recommendations in this volume serve as a springboard for our readers’ continued growth as teachers, researchers, and teacher-educators for community college first-year composition and beyond.

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