

## Profile 3

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### Profile 3: WMU ENGL 1050 (First-Year Writing) Intensive: Reaching Out and Retaining Struggling First-Year Writing Students through Faculty Intervention

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#### INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE

Western Michigan University is a public national research university in Kalamazoo, Michigan, established in 1903, with a population of 24,000 students. As Western's website emphasizes, "A wide range of resources and services focus on academic and career success, with several dedicated to meeting the special needs of such select groups as first-year students, transfer students, military veterans and youths who have aged out of the foster care system."

#### PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

In keeping with the university's prioritizing of student success, the ENGL 1050 [First-Year Writing] Intensive course (1050 Intensive) works in conjunction with the current FYW program, facilitating student success through close faculty engagements with struggling students, as opposed to primarily administratively staffed student-intervention programs. The 1050 Intensive course began in 2014 as an ad hoc attempt to assist students in jeopardy of failing WMU's first-year writing course. We knew from our own institutional data that failing (or receiving a noncreditable grade—below C) was a major marker of loss and retention failure among our first-year students.

It is our contention that composition studies is well-positioned to be a powerful force in retention and success discussions for first-year students. Our experiences and the data already generated by these first six semesters of offering the intensive course as a support to struggling FYW students appear to support that contention. We agree with Pegeen Reichert Powell, who states, "What first-year writing faculty do as a matter of course—teach smaller classes, conduct personal conferences, assign papers that call for personal writing—is a tremendous resource, deliberately or not, for retention efforts and their institutions" (43). And many years ago, Don Murray stressed how even in traditional settings, first-year writing is a place where connections and partnerships, both between instructor and student and between student and student occur:

We have to respect the student. . . . We must listen carefully for those words that may reveal a truth, that may reveal a voice. We must respect our student for his potential truth and for his potential voice. We are coaches, encouragers, developers, creators of environments in which our students can experience the writing process for themselves. (13)

What we have learned about our students goes beyond their abilities as writers, and centers more frequently on the challenges they face fitting into a classroom and a system that are foreign, intimidating, and/or inaccessible to them, whether for reasons social, emotional, cultural, or familial.

Our program leverages practices of hospitality, the partnerships and activities we do “as a matter of course” (Powell), and positions them as part of a relationship that extends the natural connections that occur in the FYW classroom. Participating faculty members work individually with their students as mentors, but also as partners in a process of critical thinking skills development, time management, organizational efficiency, problem solving, and life navigation, learning each student’s needs, weaknesses and strengths, and academic and nonacademic challenges, and then tailoring instruction style and writing focus to those conditions. The student contributes to the creation of the coursework.

Taking an early look at some of the data we’ve collected over these first six semesters may help communicate our (and our institution’s) excitement about and commitment to the 1050 Intensive course. Consider the following:

- Minoritized students constitute the majority of 1050 Intensive participants (consistently around 66 percent), yet these students achieve success in the program at the same rate as the general student population.
- Nearly 90 percent of 1050 Intensive participants identify as first-generation college students.
- Students who fail our regular FYW course typically have a 33 percent first-to-second-year retention rate. Our 1050 Intensive students, identified as being in danger of failing this FYW course, once they pass our program are retained at a 64–66 percent rate.
- Even small numbers of students can move the needle of institutional retention. The 1050 Intensive course, serving approximately twenty-five to thirty students per semester, raised the overall first-year retention rate at our 24,000-student university by 0.7 percent among all students and 1.6 percent among students who take first-year writing.
- Finally, student referrals to our program overwhelmingly occur for reasons other than those of writing proficiency. All along we had guessed this based on anecdotal evidence. However, after instituting a new placement survey submitted by referring instructors in spring 2017, we found that the top two reasons for student failure leading to instructor referral were poor attendance and missing assignments. Of those referred, 90 percent were flagged solely for those reasons.

Conclusions that can be drawn from these findings will be discussed in the Critical Reflection section of this document. At this point, a more specific description of the nuts and bolts of the program is necessary to provide a clear picture of how the 1050 Intensive course operates. This description will include five principal components: program creation, administration, and staffing; student identification, acquisition, and support; student-faculty relationship building as a pedagogical tool; program materials; and program assessment and data collection.

### **Program Creation, Administration, and Staffing**

The ENGL 1050 Intensive course is housed within WMU's English department. At the program's creation in fall 2014, two board-appointed, full-time, term faculty members were hired and tasked with the program's design, creation, and implementation.

This move originated in the narrative of a particular student whose inability to succeed in his first-year writing classroom came to a head when his instructor reported him to the FYW director and wanted him removed from class. The instructor's behavior stemmed from youth and inexperience. The student reacted confrontationally and with attitude. Intervention took place when a composition faculty member, in fact serving as chair of the department at that time, decided to work one on one with the student. After being given this opportunity, the student expressed a desire to succeed, recognized and admitted his own culpability in the events that had taken place in the classroom, worked to develop and demonstrate his writing proficiency, and, through this unique approach, passed the course. The department chair and the FYW director saw promise in this process and took action. An unexpected budget surplus generated by an absent senior faculty member opened a one-year window to bring on two entry-level term faculty appointees who could run the 1050 Intensive experiment. In fall 2014, the program was launched. The following academic year, both term appointees had their contracts renewed and funded by the College of Arts and Sciences. Prior to the start of the third year, one of the term appointees pursued and attained a tenure-track position at another institution. The one original term appointee continues to manage the program on a year-to-year contract with the assistance of the composition faculty member (the previous chair of the department from the original narrative) and one part-time instructor.

### **Student Identification, Acquisition, and Support**

WMU's general education first-year writing courses serve more than 1,200 students each academic year. As is the case at many institutions, these courses are taught almost exclusively by part-time or graduate student instructors, potentially leaving those students facing the greatest challenges to instructors with the fewest resources, especially in terms of time to dedicate to student needs above and beyond the most basic in-class matters. Although the English department can't

radically redesign this system to make full-time faculty the teachers of record in all these classrooms, it can address this weakness by providing a program like ours to make faculty available to the students in greatest need.

Our statistics reflect that between 18 and 22 percent of first-year writing students are not earning the C grade required by most majors. As we enter the sixth semester of running our program, we can say with confidence that many, if not most, of these students are failing for reasons unrelated to academic ability, while a small number require remediation. When designing the program, our goal was to find a time to intervene with these students after warning signals appeared, but before it was too late for them to develop or demonstrate their proficiency with the material the class covers.

Our current practice strives to begin meeting with the at-risk first-year writing students by Week 7 or 8 of the fifteen-week semester, allowing for six to seven weeks of faculty-student Intensive teamwork. We ask our first-year writing instructors to share names of students about whom they have concerns by semester Weeks 6 or 7, before midterm grades are due. They are required to inform us about students with issues including but not limited to chronic absence, missing assignments, potential physical/mental health issues, low-proficiency work, etc. We provide information and materials to help instructors effectively select students *for*, and communicate with students *about*, this program. Initially, instructors emailed our program a list of their qualifying students or a confirmation that they had no students to recommend. This past semester, in order to minimize the turnaround time between our requesting referrals and instructors' submitting referrals, we began using an online survey program as the method by which instructors submit the names of students experiencing difficulties in their classes. They are asked to select from drop-down menus to categorize the type of challenge each referred student displays. The survey program enables us to organize and analyze these data with greater ease and facility. Using this tool seems to have cut around a week of time off the receipt of the bulk of our instructor referrals.

Once instructors recommend students, these students are contacted via email by a program administrator with a brief introduction to the Intensive course and an application. Interested students complete the application and either return the form via email or print it out and bring it to the English department. We are excited about new plans to also use the survey program for the student application preprogram survey process next semester. We are thrilled about the ways in which this will consolidate student data, alleviate potential paperwork chaos, and help us better assess and address student challenges. After receiving submitted student applications, we process them and set up individual meeting times with the applicants. In our experience, around 50 percent of those students offered the opportunity to participate in the intensive program actually submit applications. To date, we have been able to find time to work with every student who has asked to participate.

### Student-Faculty Relationship Building as a Pedagogical Tool

When new students join the Intensive course, a form is filed with our registrar's office that removes them officially from their original class and places them into one of three intensive sections of first-year writing. The class shows on all records simply as a different section of the same course they were in previously. However, instead of going to their original classroom of twenty-two to twenty-three students, they meet one on one with a faculty member once each week and meet a second time each week as a student-faculty group to produce work in a supported setting.

As was mentioned earlier, oftentimes students who find themselves in danger of failing the first-year writing class have gotten to this point due to some challenge exacerbated by the time/location/environment of their classroom. Their challenges can be life-related: family in crisis, physical health problems, mental health issues such as anxiety or depressive disorder, work-hour conflicts, etc. Their challenges can be academic: students might be second language speakers for whom class discussion and activity move too quickly, or students who process information and instruction differently, etc. Both of these challenge categories can be dealt with through our intensive scheduling and setting.

First, participating students, in the initial meeting with their faculty member, choose from the options offered to them a time that they feel they can comfortably appear and focus on work. They sign a contract explaining what the parties can expect from each other. Days of the week when students may have family or work obligations, or times of the day when students may be more likely to experience scheduling conflicts or may be less productive, can be worked around.

Second, the student meets with the faculty member in that person's office, a space usually designed to feel welcoming, comfortable, relatively private, and somewhat personal. Not only are they not required to expose any personal information before a large audience, but their particular challenges, whether those be "life" or "academic" challenges, can be dealt with privately and purposefully, rather than their needs being one set of many, or never recognized at all. Often, their particular challenges can even become the topics they choose to research and write about. One-on-one contact makes it possible for these challenges to be discovered and acknowledged by the instructor and discussed in a private setting with the student, who can then be guided in research and discovery about related issues for the purpose of generating the writing work required by the course.

For students whose language of nurture may involve a discourse community other than the pejoratively termed "prestige English" or "academic English," such a learning environment can lessen what may feel like the hostility or condescension of the academic community. Students can feel welcomed rather than threatened or judged. Faculty members can appear more approachable, less alien. As Vincent Tinto reinforces, a "sense of belonging" is one of the three key principles affecting students' abilities to make it all the way to graduation. Almost without exception, the reflective writings of students who have successfully completed intensive sec-

tions have included comments about feeling listened to, cared about, encouraged, and connected. Past students often come back to their faculty partner's office for a cup of tea and a chance to talk. Faculty members share themselves and their spaces and student relationships have a chance to become grounded.

In addition to these one-on-one meetings in a faculty member's office, students contract to meet one day each week, usually Friday morning, for a two-hour session in the library for group work and instruction. All of the Intensive course students bring their assignments for that week to the university library, where a section of the first-floor study space is reserved for them. This time is for them to produce work. Their faculty members, as well as a number of graduate student assistants, are present to answer questions as they occur or to offer direction in order to help students over the hurdles of getting assignments completed. Students challenged by just sitting down and doing what needs to be done are greatly served by this work time. Holding this work session in the library acquaints students with this important space and demonstrates its benefits as a location for productivity.

### **Program Materials: The Binder as a Tool for Developing General Academic and Subject-Specific Skills**

The Intensive course binder serves as an aid in understanding and mastering academic best practices, an opportunity to show the students tools for managing their productivity. We provide the students with these binders, containing all the materials and information they will need to be successful in the Intensive course. The front pocket contains the paperwork the student must fill out (the course-change form for the registrar and the student contract). Hole-punched and inserted in the inner rings are the following materials:

- Our new “week-at-a-glance” calendar template on which the student and faculty member, during the first meeting session, record the day and time of the individual meeting, the Friday morning work session, and three additional hours of personal time that the student agrees to set aside to produce work on his or her own. As part of the newly implemented time-management/goal-setting segment, the student is required to acknowledge and plan for out-of-class work time and to brainstorm strategies for overcoming obstacles that may have complicated previous academic efforts.
- An assignment-completion schedule with a place for the agreed-upon due date for each of the four writing assignments and a box to check when each assignment is approved.
- A “what we did today” and “what is due next session” chart to be filled out at each meeting with the work that was turned in that day and the work that is due at the next session. As with the other sheets, both the faculty member and the student fill out their own copies of this sheet.

- Four pocket dividers and four assignment explanation sheets, one for each writing assignment to be completed. We instruct students to keep each assignment's process work and finished product in its own pocket folder. As the students work through the assignments, concrete connections can be seen between the stages of the work. The ways in which each assignment leads to the next and relates to the next become visible. Additionally, all the materials the student needs in order to be productive in the meetings are contained in one place. When they have a question about an assignment, the faculty member says, "Pull out your binder and let's look at the assignment sheet."

Each student creates the following series of assignments: a research proposal, an annotated bibliography, a research paper, and a reflective piece that looks back on the experience of participating in the Intensive course. Since we generally have a maximum of six weeks with the student at the point we begin work with them, we have crafted this chain of production as one that allows students to develop or demonstrate all of the same learning outcomes required by the regular FYW course. Our goals are the same as those of the FYW class; only our instructional context differs. We are able to work with our students to produce a satisfactory assignment series in six weeks because the program is intensive. The fact that each hour of work involves a faculty member's direct contact with and guidance of each student facilitates this productivity.

The binder works as a tangible testimony to the student's productivity and as a prominent tool in stressing their own feelings of efficacy. Tinto notes that the development of a confidence in their own efficacy is an essential element in students' having the motivation and desire to complete their degrees and graduate. A frequent comment that students make in the reflective writing produced at the end of the semester involves how clear and easy to understand everything was in the Intensive section. They most often talk about the binder and its components and express their intention of applying this binder method to all the other classes they take. They see that they can increase their success in other classes by using the organizational and scheduling skills they develop in the Intensive course.

### **Program Assessment and Data Collection**

As explained earlier, this program began as an ad hoc attempt to deal with students who were facing addressable challenges in their first-year writing classrooms. We had no idea what kind of a response we would get if we offered every student in difficulty a chance to work in an alternative learning environment. We were actually a little scared we might be overrun, both because first-year writing instructors would be overly enthusiastic about getting students out of their classrooms, and because students might see an Intensive section as an easy way out of a time-consuming obligation. We found we were mistaken.

Worried that more students would apply than we could work with, we designed our initial referral directions to set instructors up as strict gatekeepers of the pro-

gram, asking them to recommend only students “mathematically incapable” of passing the course by Week 7 or 8. For that reason, we only had fourteen students apply to the program in fall 2014, despite the fact that more than sixty sections of the class were being offered. Our hopes that more students could be served led us to rethink the language we used with instructors leading up to the spring 2015 referral time. At that time we instead asked instructors to recommend students “in danger of” not receiving the required C to pass the class. Instructors were asked to refer any student who seemed challenged. This would allow the faculty running the program to have more responsibility for the student acquisition process and decrease potential stress or pressure individual instructors might feel regarding their selection criteria. As a result, we accepted sixteen students into the spring 2015 Intensive course despite the fact that only half the number of sections of FYW were being taught, effectively doubling our participation ratio.

So that first academic year we worked with thirty students. Twenty of these students were nonwhite. Of the thirty, twenty-four students who would otherwise have failed the course passed. Of that twenty-four, eleven students registered and participated in classes the following fall semester, a 36 percent retention rate.

Our second year running the program, academic year 2015–16, we experienced much more encouraging results. We worked individually with fifty students, thirty-three of whom were nonwhite (continuing a 66 percent nonwhite participation rate). Of those fifty students, forty-seven ended up passing, increasing our passing percentage from 80 percent to 94 percent. But most exciting is our retention figure from that year. Of the fifty students who participated in the Intensive course, thirty-two of them, or 64 percent, were currently registered and taking classes in fall 2016. Our retention rate increased from 36 percent to 64 percent with the population of students with the highest likelihood of leaving the university, students who would have failed first-year writing. The retention rate for students failing 1050 in general, we discovered after doing some statistical analyses last fall, is normally around 32 percent. We hope to continue seeing these kinds of numbers.

### Critical Reflection

In closing, what we do increases the odds that our students will persist with their degrees and strives to make that degree attainment as time- and cost-effective as possible. The program benefits a wide student demographic, but particularly addresses issues of inequality that exist in black and other minoritized student degree attainment, allowing participants to demonstrate or develop desired program outcomes in ways that can be more purposefully Afrocentric and respectful of student lived experience and day-to-day obstacles through, as detailed in *Afrocentric Teacher-Research: Rethinking Appropriateness and Inclusion*, the implementation of linguistically diverse language policies and pedagogies (Perryman-Clark). We build connections between students and academe by forging student-faculty bonds, framing faculty as accessible allies, and, we hope, increasing future help-seeking

behavior, often a level of scaffolding black and minoritized students resist and/or feel unentitled to. We've created a course in which students have significant input into the class schedule as well as increased investment and interest in the writing they produce, practicing Powell's kairotic pedagogy by encouraging potentially disenfranchised students to locate productive connections between the work they are asked to do and the hurdles they encounter to their academic participation and performance. Finally, we increase university-wide retention.

New Literacy scholar James Paul Gee theorizes that becoming "literate" in any secondary discourse community, in our particular circumstance the academic or university discourse community, always requires more learning and exposure than can take place in a classroom. An enculturation process must occur for fluency to have a chance, and this enculturation requires more of an "apprenticeship" or mentoring system. Often, underrepresented and minoritized students' primary discourse communities contain less transfer of features from secondary, "dominant" discourse communities such as exist in academia and/or professional environments than do those of the average middle-class student. Gee connects exposure to this transfer of features to success and positive assessment of ability in school. He states, "It is a key device in the creation of a group of elites who appear to demonstrate quick and effortless mastery of dominant secondary Discourses, by 'talent' or 'native ability,' when in fact, they have simply *practiced* aspects of them longer" (15). Since more than 65 percent of our Intensive course students come to us from black and other minoritized populations, this mentorship enculturation with faculty aware of these realities serves an additional purpose.

Sharing narratives demonstrating some of our actual work with specific students may highlight the ways in which the Intensive course's processes and mentoring practices unfold. To this end, we have chosen two particular student stories to include.

### Sherman

Sherman identifies as African American but also considers himself multiracial, citing a long and complicated family genealogy. He has a long history of being let down by those in authority. As he tells it, he was used by his family for personal and emotional reasons, abandoned and sent to foster care at an early age, shuffled from institution to institution and home to home by state authorities, and diagnosed with multiple and conflicting emotional and mental disorders, based on the needs and biases of institutions and medical professionals. He arrived at college only as the result of his long and painful personal commitment to reduce the medications he was receiving for various things such as bipolar disorder, ADHD, oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), and others, which had resulted in continual disciplinary infractions in his placements and a reputation as a troublemaker and a malcontent. Despite this, he remains deeply committed to self-improvement, to his own educa-

tion, and mostly to a burning desire to research and reform the foster youth medical and educational system in the United States.

To interact with Sherman, you have to understand his perceptions and how they have been shaped by his past. He has developed a deep distrust of anyone in authority, with a keen eye for ulterior motives. Shuffled from home to home and from setting to setting, he has been an on-and-off ward of the state throughout most of his youth. He has also been subjected to multiple diagnoses of various mental and emotional disorders and given a wide variety of medicines and drugs that often contradicted each other, based on the whims, background, and biases of the medical authorities at each setting. He recounts, with great pride, the ways he has fought the systems and weaned himself off unneeded medications, often at great peril—being labeled recalcitrant, angry, or uncooperative along the way.

Although he never committed a crime, Sherman's experiences have given him all the emotional traits of a released offender—PTSD, distrust, visions of a violent and unjust world. He wonders who is going to screw him first. In university classes, this means that he often challenges faculty and students inappropriately, seeking to find out what they “really” want; he has trouble relating to others. For him, a group project isn't just a means of collaboration, it's a scary return to the youth home and the people who tried to get him committed. A discussion with a professor isn't just a way to get help; it's talking to an authority figure with questionable motives and an opportunity to screw him and label him a failure.

As one might expect, Sherman's postsecondary experiences have not always been smooth. In between the occasional brilliant performances in classes and on topics he finds important have been periods of conflict and anger and periods of sporadic attendance. In spring 2016, Sherman was assigned to a developmental writing class with one of our most experienced and compassionate instructors, a military veteran with vast experience with students from all background and abilities—the sort of person who is well-equipped professionally and emotionally to deal with a student such as Sherman. Sherman quickly alienated other students, considering them to be unworthy to review his work; his aggressive demeanor scared some and changed the classroom community negatively. He also marginalized the instructor. When she tried to give him feedback, he refused to accept it, considering her perspective unqualified for the topic he was writing on—his quest to expose the foster system. Additionally, on a topic he was deeply committed to, his writing was at times ineffective; he was so deeply connected to the subject that he found it difficult to write coherent prose. Annotated bibliographies became rants on perspectives; introductory paragraphs turned into angry personal narratives; academic support sections evolved into critiques on the biases of the writers.

Sherman turned on the instructor, accusing her of verbal abuse and making a complaint to her supervisor. Once these were explored and resolved (with no verification found), Sherman and his instructor made a mutual decision to have him complete the class away from the rest of the students. Ultimately, Sherman

completed the class and advanced to first-year writing, where the pattern reasserted itself. Sherman stopped coming to class, refused to interact with peers, and was eventually referred to the Intensive program.

We were worried about working with him. His history of conflict with instructors was troubling. We were nervous at our first meeting. When we first met Sherman, we had to first establish a relationship. We didn't try to be in authority. Instead, we let him set the boundaries and we then reacted and assisted. Rather than establish ourselves as the authority figures, we spent two sessions talking and getting to know one another. Then, and only then, did we begin to look at the academics of the course. Although rewarding, this was emotionally exhausting. It also set Sherman behind some other students, but it established the means by which he could comfortably work. There developed some trust—though he was still slightly wary—that we weren't out to hurt him. We then established goals, a product, and a purpose for his writing. He didn't write perfectly, but he did create a detailed annotated bibliography on foster care in the United States, with a focus on the flawed funding model that incentivizes medication over mentoring and counseling. He was also able to write an executive summary of his findings and a proposal for action. In all, he produced more than fifteen polished pages of academic work, encompassing three different genres, all of which included significant research and synthesis. Although he never completed a traditional research paper, he was able to demonstrate his ability to take a question or idea, explore it, and put the results in a coherent format for future use. Sherman has transferred to another institution but continues his journey toward his goal of entering a social work field.

### Shana

Shana, a young African American woman I first taught in my developmental writing course in the fall of 2016, barely passed that class because of her challenges with “academic” English and her extreme reluctance to speak or engage during class. She would sit at her desk without any materials, looking down at the desktop, while other students did freewriting exercises or brainstorming work. When prompted, she would quietly, and in as few words as possible, explain the nature of her confusion or admit to a lack of materials and I would do my best to provide whatever was necessary to get her started. Barbara Mellix, in her essay “From Outside, In,” powerfully explains the potential foreignness and otherness of academic English to a student whose primary discourse community not only differs from, but may have strong cultural conflicts and tension with, the so-called “Standard” variety. Mellix stresses the particular difficulty of writing about oneself using the language of the other, a common requirement in both developmental and first-year writing. Indeed, Shana ended up passing when she found herself permitted to use her own voice to create a lovely project for a final unit on motivational writing. She put together a motivational presentation in which she shared favorite quotations often originating in music she loved or verses from the Bible, explained how and

why the quotations were meaningful, and shared photographs that she had taken that had a connection to the quotations and sentiments. We had discussed purposefully choosing the “language” of a piece of writing based on the audience for whom it was intended. Because her presentation’s intended audience consisted of her “family/kin,” her primary discourse community, she wrote in her own language of nurture, AAVE. Part of the pedagogy of the course involved seeing writing as an act of communicating ideas rather than an act of avoiding “errors.” When she felt empowered to communicate her ideas in the language that shaped them, she exhibited strong genre analysis, audience anticipation, and purpose-accomplishment skills. She evidenced fluency in the four traditions of black semantics detailed in Geneva Smitherman’s *Talkin and Testifyin*, namely, “West African language background; servitude and oppression; music and ‘cool talk’; and the traditional black church” (43).

In the spring of 2017, at midterm, I saw Shana’s name on the list of students reported to be in danger of failing the regular first-year writing course. Her instructor had offered her an opportunity to participate in the Intensive course, but she had not applied. I emailed her and personally invited her to work with me to get this class completed. She agreed, and we began to meet one on one. At first, she was again very reluctant to speak, smile, or even make eye contact. After some time spent discussing how her semester was going in her other classes and what resources or help might be available for her, she seemed to feel a bit more comfortable and relaxed. As we discussed what topic she might like to investigate for a research project, she mentioned being interested in knowing more about the prison system. She later asked whether her father could be one of her sources of information as he was currently incarcerated. We worked on narrowing her focus and she decided she would investigate the role of prison counselors and the services and benefits they were meant to provide inmates. She was able to have at least two conversations with her father specifically regarding his experience with prison counselors and it seemed meaningful to her to be able to have this be part of her research. She also mentioned to me that she contacted a brother who had also been incarcerated to discuss his experience as well. These were issues that had been weighing on her, and the opportunity to satisfy her desire to understand the life experiences of people she loved and worried about while simultaneously fulfilling a class requirement made her research process much more meaningful and successful. One of the pillars of the Intensive program arises from Powell’s concept of a kairotic pedagogy, one that allows students to write about issues that are important to them at the particular time or moment of the class. While it is certainly not always the case, studies have shown that minoritized and underrepresented students have a higher likelihood of stressors and life-related responsibilities outside of the classroom, and it is crucial to acknowledge those challenges and incorporate them into the research path itself.

Shana’s writing process was slow and arduous. Together we would brainstorm a paragraph topic sentence and then I would leave her to write down everything

she thought connected to that main idea, stressing that she not self-edit or worry about technical issues. It would often take her an hour to write five to six sentences. We would then brainstorm another topic sentence and repeat the process. By this means, over weeks of talking with me as she wrote, she produced enough body paragraphs to create a basic essay. No class would have made this pace of production possible, but she seemed to gain an understanding of paragraph construction and combination as a result. Over these weeks of one-on-one work, we covered those points of essay writing that would have been covered in one or two class periods in her previous class: She managed successful source quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing; she correctly attributed sources within her text; she created a works cited page; she performed the moves made in introductions and conclusions. In short, she wrote, revised, and edited a research paper. During the editing phase, we were able to discuss the specific aspects of AAVE grammar that appeared most frequently in her writing as well as the expectations of “academic” English grammar. In Shana’s case, this mostly involved zero copula (“he always waiting”) and lack of third-person singular “s” verb endings (he get an appointment once a week). Again, Smitherman provides a detailed breakdown of “West African language rules that were grafted onto early Black English, and which still operate in Black English today” (6). By noticing a few specific variation examples, talking about them as different grammar expectations rather than mistakes, and practicing their production in the context of academic writing, Shana gained understanding and efficacy as a writer. By spending time in a mentorship-apprenticeship relationship, the only way according to Gee that secondary discourse community fluency can be acquired, Shana strengthened her willingness to communicate and developed her familiarity with academic discourse as a whole, comprising so much more than just speaking/writing.

### MOVING FORWARD

As we continue with the Intensive Program, we have a number of goals to pursue. First, we seek more substantial ways to take the lessons learned in our one-on-one work with underrepresented and minoritized students and communicate them to our first-year writing instructors, allowing them to better serve these students within their original class environments. Of course, a number of the issues our program successfully mediates require the alternative learning setting. Still, more targeted in-class attention and awareness can only be positive. Second, we are looking for ways to share information about our Intensive course and its possibilities throughout our university’s College of Arts and Sciences with the goal of providing similar scaffolding in other departments. To this end, we are in contact with other student success and support programs such as ALPHA, TRIO, CAMP, Broncos First Professional Learning Communities, SEITA Scholars, etc. Our at-risk, underrepresented student population would surely benefit from additional resources and

mentorship opportunities with faculty across campus and not just from the English department.

### SAMPLE PEDAGOGICAL MATERIALS

The following materials are examples of the ENGL 1050 Intensive binder contents.

#### Student Contract

Dear Student,

We are pleased to offer you the opportunity to enroll in an ENGL 1050 Intensive section with Dr. Lishman/Dr. Redding/Dr. Bush. Currently, you are unlikely to pass your ENGL 1050 section. Participating in this 1050 Intensive involves attending all scheduled meetings, putting in all required work hours, and completing, on time, all of the assignments listed in the binder. If you do not complete ALL of the requirements, including regular meetings, personal work time, and assignment submission, you will forfeit this opportunity and earn an E for the course.

Below are the contractual guidelines for enrollment and completion of this Intensive section. Signing this document means that you have read and agree to the terms and conditions.

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand that I will earn a passing grade of C upon successful completion of the course.

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand that I must complete ALL of the required assignments ON TIME including a research proposal, annotated bibliography, research project, and course reflection in order to receive a passing grade.

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand that I must attend an individual meeting AND a small-group writing session EACH WEEK in order to receive a passing grade.

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand that I must respond to correspondence from my instructor within twenty-four hours. Failure to do so may be used as grounds for removal from the program.

\_\_\_\_\_ I commit to investing at least five hours/week of time to work on materials for this course. I have completed the schedule specifying those hours.

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand that materials produced for this class may be used for research and publication. No personally identifying information will be used without my permission.

I hereby accept and agree to all the terms and conditions as outlined above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Goal Sheet and Work Agreement

Primary Goal: PASS ENGL-1050

Subgoal: Dedicate five hours/week to producing the material required to satisfy ENGL 1050 Intensive requirements.

Motivation: Since you are here, we assume it is very important to you to pass this course THIS SEMESTER. Think specifically for a moment about why that is.

What are the specific negatives of not passing? (Try to name at least three.):

What are the specific positives of passing? (Try to name at least three.):

What obstacles have prevented you from excelling in ENGL 1050 so far this semester?

What, specifically, will prevent these factors from continuing to affect your success as you join the ENGL 1050 Intensive course? How will things be different now?

Time commitment: It is important for you to plan to spend at least five hours/week (including our one-hour one-on-one meeting) working on fulfilling this class's requirements. You will be required to attend a one- to two-hour work session on Friday mornings (between 10 a.m. and noon). That leaves two to three additional hours each week that you need to set aside.

When, specifically, will you put in those hours?

What obstacles might potentially prevent you from putting in those five hours/week?

How will you overcome those obstacles? (Think about if-then statements.):

Are you willing to invest five hours/week each week for the rest of the semester in order to pass ENGL 1050?

If yes, go to the WEEKLY SCHEDULE page and fill in our meeting hours and your planned weekly work-on-your-own hours.

## Research Proposal Assignment Sheet

### ENGL 1050 Intensive Research Proposal

#### Assignment Overview:

You will fill out a “Narrowing Your Topic” handout that will form the basis for your proposal. For this research proposal, choose a narrowed topic that you plan to investigate further for your research project. Write a paragraph about what you already know about this topic, and then a paragraph about what you *don't* know, have questions about, or would like to know about the topic. Finally, predict what you might argue in connection with these ideas. It is understood that this will evolve as your research and analysis progress. Eventually, you will have a working thesis statement.

#### Assignment Specifics:

Your proposal must:

- be around five hundred words in length.
- acknowledge that your topic is part of an ongoing conversation and generates complex questions.
- share the potential arguments you think might be generated by answers to the questions you've asked.
- propose conclusions that would not be overly obvious, conclusions that require your research to support.

#### Possible Proposal Outline

- I. The topic I plan to investigate further for my research project is. . . . The information I already know about this topic includes . . .
- II. There are many interesting questions that can be asked about this topic. Some of these questions are . . .
- III. A possible argument (or arguments) that I envision making about this topic involves . . .

#### Formatting

- Times New Roman – 12-point font
- Double-spaced throughout
- Title “Research Proposal” centered
- Name, class, date upper left-hand corner

## Research Paper Assignment Sheet

### ENGL 1050 Intensive Research Project

#### Assignment Overview:

Your research project must present the information gathering and analytical thinking you have performed in connection with the working thesis statement approved

in your research proposal. This paper must demonstrate the evolution of that thesis statement based on your research. You must use the sources you have located and carefully considered in order to support an argument/claim you are making. As in the research proposal, this project must acknowledge that your topic is part of an ongoing conversation and reflect what you are adding to that conversation.

### **Assignment Specifics:**

Your research project must:

- be four to six pages in length;
- expand upon the complex, working thesis statement set forth in the research proposal;
- address opposing arguments and viewpoints;
- correctly cite at least three of the sources analyzed in your annotated bibliography on a properly formatted works cited page;
- adhere to the rules of grammar/mechanics proper to the audience for which the project is intended;
- be submitted in your ENGL 1050I binder as a hard copy, in Times New Roman, 12-point font, double-spaced throughout; and
- include name, class, and date in upper left-hand corner.

### **Final Reflection Writing Assignment Sheet**

This page will be adapted into an online survey that students will fill out upon completion of the program assignments beginning fall 2017. Final versions of that survey are still being compiled.

### **ENGL 1050 Intensive Reflective Writing**

#### **Assignment Overview:**

The goal of this final assignment is threefold: help us learn about you and your educational background, tell a little bit about what went on in your original ENGL 1050 class, and share your reaction to the Intensive Program. It may be helpful to think about organizing your ideas into three paragraphs, one for each section.

#### **Assignment Specifics:**

Your reflective writing should:

- tell us about your history and educational background:
  - Where did you grow up?
  - Where did you go to high school?
  - How did you feel about school growing up?
  - Are you a first-generation college student?
- tell us about what was challenging in your ENGL 1050 course:
  - Were you absent a lot?

- Were the requirements hard to understand?
- Is English your second language?
- tell us about your experience in the Intensive Program:
  - What did you think worked well?
  - Did you gain any specific skills?
  - Were the materials helpful?
  - Was the one-on-one accountability helpful?

Format this paper according to our normal formatting rules:

- Times New Roman 12-point font
- Double-spaced throughout
- Name/class/date in upper left-hand corner
- Standard English grammar

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