

CSM Research Briefs

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Writing in the End Zone I and II: Improving Student Outcomes in Developmental English

INTRODUCTION

Anecdotal evidence has suggested that students enrolled in the two-semester “Writing in the End Zone I & II” learning communities (LCOM) were successfully persisting to subsequent coursework in greater numbers than comparable developmental English populations. Typically students enrolled in “Writing in the End Zone I & II” have been young, African-American and Pacific Islander males—students who frequently are among those least represented in higher education. As a Trustees Program Improvement Project, John Sewart and Milla McConnell-Tuite conducted a comparative analysis of quantitative measures of student success for these learning communities, specifically rates of course completion and persistence for the period of time Fall 2004 – Spring 2005 and Fall 2005 – Spring 2006.

Findings indicate that Writing in the End Zone I & II have had an important and positive impact among students who historically have been most at-risk.

The two-semester “Writing in the End Zone I & II” learning communities were formed to link the ‘community’ of intercollegiate athletic football players—and their coach—with the English composition classes in which the majority of these students enroll.

The Fall semesters (2004 & 2005) consisted of:

- ENGL 828, Basic Composition and Reading, 5 units
- PE 684, Introduction to College & Intercollegiate Athletics, 2 units

The Spring semesters (2005 & 2006) consisted of:

- ENGL 838, Intensive Introduction to Composition and Reading, 5 units
- FITN 220, Weight Conditioning for Varsity Football, 2 units.

Professor Bret Pollack was the instructor/coach for the physical education classes, Professor Katherine

“Teeka” James for the Fall ENGL 828 sections, and Professor James Carranza for the Spring ENGL 838 sections.

ENGL 828 and ENGL 838 are the lowest levels of developmental English offered at CSM, frequently enrolling students who possess reading comprehension skills at middle school level or lower. These developmental English courses often serve as academic ‘gatekeepers’ for students’ overall college success. Historically, these courses report lower rates of course completion and persistence to the next course as compared to college-wide averages, a pattern common among community colleges and within remedial higher education programs. These courses also enroll underrepresented students at a higher rate than that of the CSM collegewide average.

STUDY FOCUS: COMPLETION AND PERSISTENCE

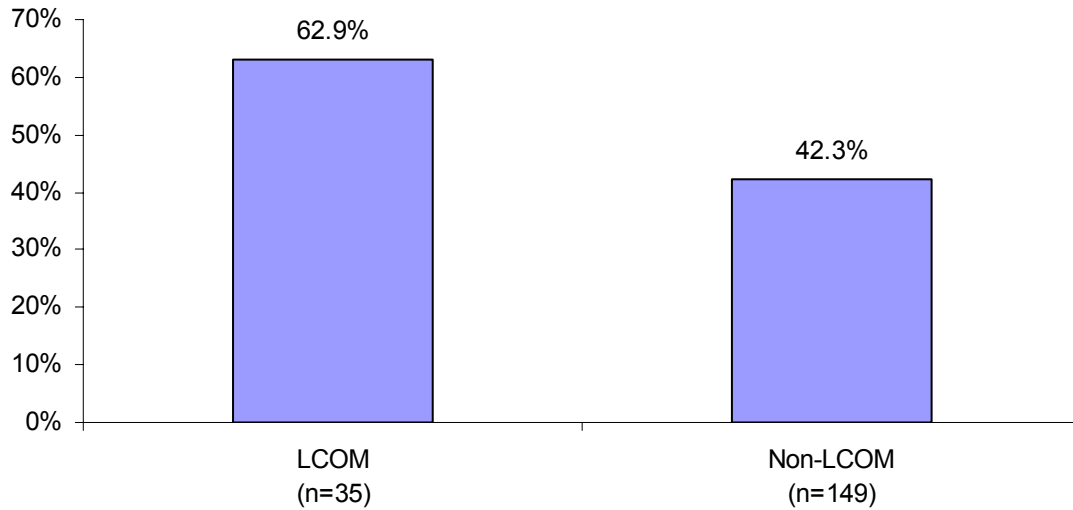
We examined rates of course completion—perhaps the most basic measure of student success—for LCOM participants and compared that to course completion rates among non-LCOM students enrolled in the same term.

We also analyzed persistence data—i.e., the pattern of student enrollment into subsequent classes in a progression. ENGL 828 students (both LCOM and non-LCOM) are tracked for subsequent enrollment into ENGL 838 in the immediately subsequent term: specifically, the rate at which ENGL 828 Fall 2004 students persisted to ENGL 838 in Spring 2005; and the rate at which ENGL 828 Fall 2005 students persisted to ENGL 838 in Spring 2006.

ENGL 828 STUDENTS

The numbers of students enrolling in all sections of ENGL 828 were roughly the same in the two fall semesters. For the combined semesters, 184 students were enrolled in ENGL 828: 149 Non-LCOM and 35

Figure 1
**ENGL 828 Successful Course Completion Rates
 LCOM vs. Non-LCOM**



LCOM. The LCOM classes were small, 35 students for both semesters, and represent 19% of ENGL 828 enrollees in Fall 2004 and Fall 2005 combined.

Findings: In terms of successful course completion, Fall 2004 and Fall 2005 semesters combined, LCOM students outperformed Non-LCOM students: 62.9% vs. 42.3% respectively. (See Figure 1)

Findings: Study results are even more striking for younger students. Historically, students 19 years or younger have the very lowest rates of success in developmental or remedial course work. This was not true for LCOM students, the

majority of whom were younger students (74.3%). **In the group of students 19 years or younger, LCOM students succeeded at a significantly higher rate than Non-LCOM: 61.5% vs. 37.0%.**

The majority of students enrolled in all sections of ENGL 828 for the study period were non-white: LCOM 97.0% vs. Non-LCOM 74.8%. (See Figure 2)

Findings: What is most significant, however, is the success of the African American population of LCOM ENGL 828 students. The history of lower than average rates of academic success among African American students in higher educa-

Figure 2
ENGL 828 LCOM vs. Non-LCOM Students -- Ethnicity

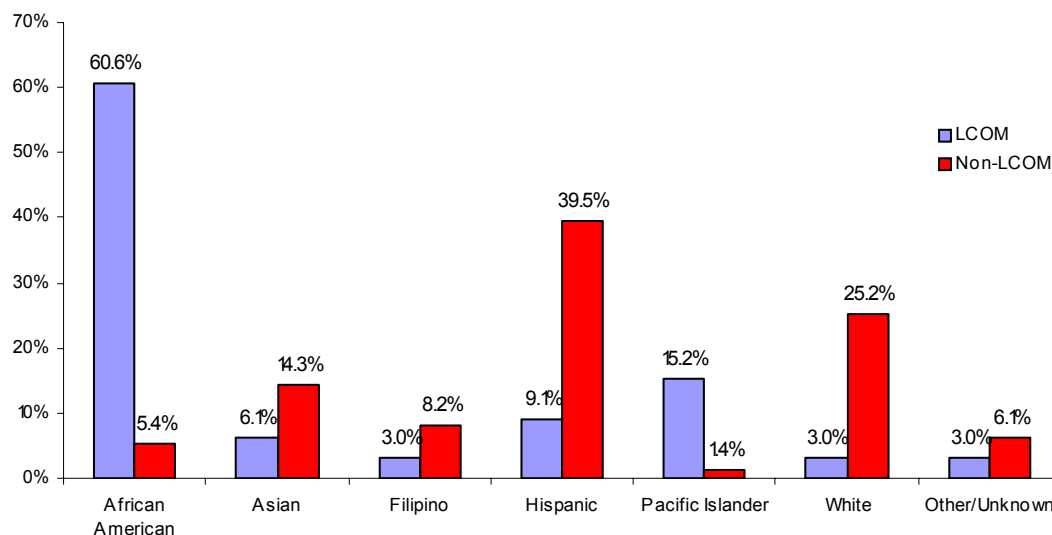
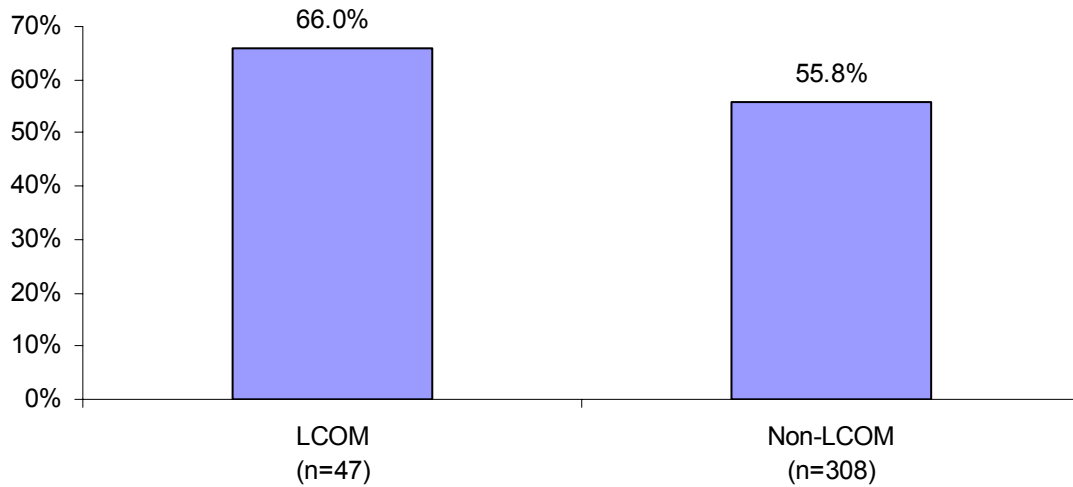


Figure 3
ENGL 838 Successful Course Completion Rates
LCOM vs. Non-LCOM



tion has been well documented in countless studies. The majority (60.6%) of students enrolled in LCOM ENGL 828 were African American. **The success of African American students in LCOM ENGL 828 is striking when compared to that of African Americans enrolled in Non-LCOM ENGL 828: 70.0% vs. 37.5%. In addition, the success rates for Pacific Island students were also extremely high: 80.0%.** (No comparison data as the Pacific Island population was absent from the Non-LCOM ENGL 828.) At the same time, there was little variation in the performance of Hispanic students: 33.3% for LCOM students vs. 31.0% for Non-LCOM students.

ENGL 838 STUDENTS

LCOM ENGL 838 enrolled 47 students while Non-LCOM ENGL 838 enrolled 308 students. The LCOM sections were almost equal in size, 25 students in Spring 2005 and 22

students in Spring 2006. Nearly all were male. The students were all 25 years or younger, 57.4% 19 years or younger, and 42.6% were 20 -25 years old.

Findings: Successful course completion rates were moderately higher for LCOM students when compared to Non-LCOM students: 66.0% vs. 55.8%. (See Figure 3)

As in the ENGL 828 LCOM group, the vast majority of ENGL 838 students are younger students of color. As such, this learning community provides a significant opportunity for success among this population of students enrolled in developmental English coursework.

As shown in Figure 4, 50.0% were African American and 22.7% were Pacific Islanders. In contrast, these groups were represented in much smaller number in the Non-LCOM sections: 4.9% were African Americans and 5.2% were Pacific Islanders.

Figure 4
ENGL 838 LCOM vs. Non-LCOM Students -- Ethnicity

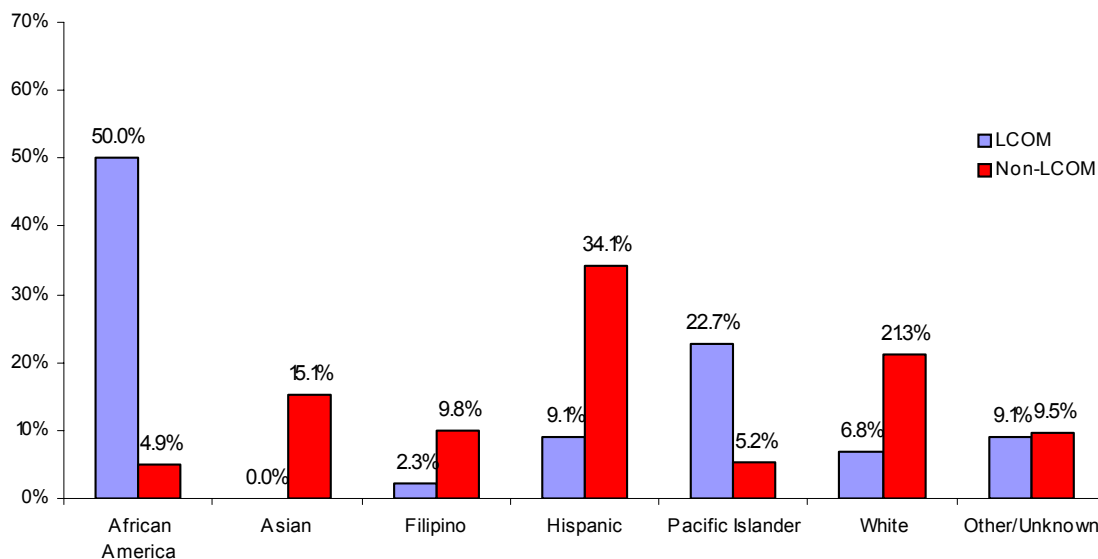
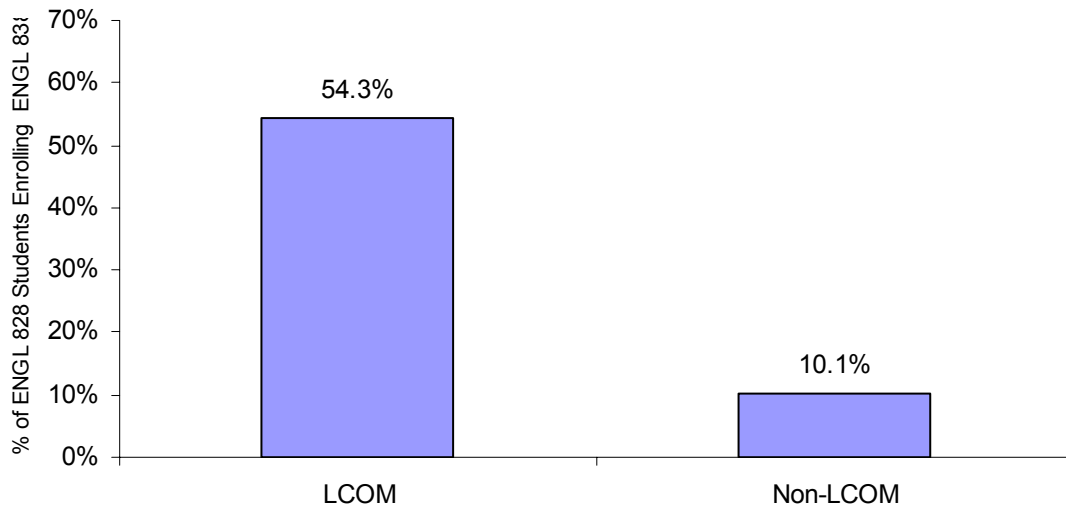


Figure 5
ENGL 828 to ENGL 838 Persistence
LCOM vs. Non-LCOM



Findings: The success of minority students in LCOM ENGL 838 is greater than that of comparable students in Non-LCOM ENGL 828. For African Americans—77.3% vs. 66.7%; for Pacific Islanders—60.0% vs. 56.3%. Although the gains made here are not as great as those registered in LCOM ENGL 828, they are still promising.

PERSISTENCE: ENGL 828 TO ENGL 838

Historically, the proportion of developmental students' progression from one course to the next in a series of discipline-specific courses is poor in community colleges. That is to say, the overwhelming majority of students do not persist or progress to the next step(s) in coursework leading to an AA/AS Degree and/or transfer. This pattern of very high attrition is found in all disciplines, especially Mathematics, English, Reading, and ESL coursework.

Findings: This study examined what proportion of LCOM and Non-LCOM ENGL 828 students enrolled in ENGL 838 in the immediate subsequent semester. **Data indicated a significant gain (+40%) in the persistence associated with LCOM enrollment: 54.3% vs. 10.1% (n=15).** (See Figure 5)

CONCLUSIONS

Writing in the End Zone I and II offers a genuine opportunity for success in English gatekeeper courses among students who are most at risk and the least represented in higher education. *Writing in the End Zone* faculty are to be

greatly and enthusiastically commended. Moreover, the data suggest that this learning community experience positively affects students' inclination to persist into the subsequent semester. The rate of gain registered in this limited study is rarely found in any study tracking the academic achievement of remedial students enrolled in postsecondary education.

Additional research is planned to explore more thoroughly the qualitative dimensions of developmental English students' success. These qualitative dimensions include the nature of student-instructor-coach interactions, peer relations both in the classroom and on the field, course content, and pedagogic practices. In addition, a larger and more thorough longitudinal study of quantitative student outcomes is planned, including tracking outcomes of a new ENGL 100 and VARS 130 learning community (*Writing in the End Zone, Part III*) beginning Fall 2007. These future studies will yield useful information about the interventions and practices that serve this population in particular—practices which hopefully can be applied to other educational experiences for at-risk populations.