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THE LEARNING ASSISTANCE REVIEW

National College Learning Center Association

About *The Learning Assistance Review*

The Learning Assistance Review is an official publication of the National College Learning Center Association (NCLCA). NCLCA serves faculty, staff, and graduate students in the field of learning assistance at two- and four-year colleges, vocational and technical schools, and universities. All material published by *The Learning Assistance Review* is copyrighted by NCLCA and can be used only upon expressed written permission.

Editorial Board

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Letter from the Editor

The record-breaking snow fall throughout the nation this season appears to have clogged more than the roads. Submissions to TLAR have been reduced to less than a sporadic flurry. For the first time since I assumed the position as editor, I must sadly report that we did not get enough qualifying submissions to present a full-issue for Spring 2010.

I know how hard it is to beak from our collective "mission" to provide quality academic support to students in higher education. That is our essence; it is what makes our profession of learning assistance providers a unique hybrid in academe. That is also what makes the opportunity for scholarly discourse so important. Please review our submission guidelines, "Pertinent Publishing Parameters," at the end of this issue and consider submitting.

If you have ideas on how to proceed but want direction on how to set a timeline for success, how to incorporate significant statistics, or how to structure your submission, please do not hesitate to let me know. Both Jeannine Rajan, TLAR managing editor, and I take learning assistance seriously, including helping first-time—and sometimes veteran—submitters navigate the seemingly un-marked slalom from idea to publication.

Although our issue may not have the full complement of articles, the ones we have for your reading are quite exciting.

We are presenting the second part of a two-part series that provides a refreshing look at reading and writing programs. "Teaching Students to 'Cook': Promoting Writing in the First Year Experience Course," found in the "Join the Conversation: Further Research" segment, promotes the concept of writing excellence and offers specific ways to incorporate it into an FYE class. The first part, focusing on the reading, was published in our Fall 2009 issue.

We also have a "Join the Conversation: Idea Exchange" entry, with some discussion springing from our Fall 2009 article, "English Camp: A Language Immersion Program in Thailand."

The article "Tutoring: A Support Strategy for At-Risk Students" presents a plan for empowering at-risk students that shows a correlation from tutoring to success and graduation.

Our book review examines *StrengthsFinder 2.0.*, in terms of how well the personality assessment tool offers insight into other people and guidance for improving collaborative work.

By the time this issue is published and in your hands, the record-breaking snow will be gone and just a memory. The magic of the seasons will kick in, and we can all feel renewed. I hope the sense of rejuvenation will encourage more submissions. Regardless, we can look forward to our upcoming NCLCA conference, "Racing to Student Excellence: NCLCA 2010," in Charlotte, NC from September 29-October 2.

Christine Reichert

Christine Reichert
Editor

CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION:
English Camp: More Discussion, Please!

Nancy Brown
Lourdes College

Kris Rugasken's and Jacqueline A. Harris's article in the Fall 2009 issue of *TLAR*, "English Camp: A Language Immersion Program in Thailand" (14/2, 43-51) brought forward several interesting points about their program that demonstrate the value of immersion as a method for teaching a foreign language. (In the case of the students Rugasken discusses, the foreign language is English.) Having been the beneficiary of foreign language immersion myself, I can substantiate the success the authors reported on with three students in the areas of cultural development, oral facility, and confidence in using the target language. In my program, following four years of traditional language study in college, I studied French at Cite Universitaire de Reims. Much as in Rugasken's program, we students—of varying levels of fluency—spent three weeks taking classes in culture, art, economics, and literature in the morning and making excursions in the afternoons. Our teachers and escorts were teachers and other professionals from the community. Situated as we were, staying in dormitories on a university campus, we also experienced interactions with other students studying at the regular university; we took our meals in the cafeteria with them, and frequently we went out with them in the evenings. Our only contact with English was in our dorms if we had a few minutes to relax before lights out. The benefits of such immersion were astounding, and my self-confidence and fluency grew by leaps and bounds. Therefore, I have no doubt that the results Rugasken reports were as successful, and I have no doubt that counselors and students learned a lot from each other during their time together.

However, fluency in listening and speaking an L2 does not guarantee being able to write it equally well. When I later taught English as a Second Language, I diagnosed a lot of student writing in English to try to determine their growing proficiency—in fact, it was a weekly occurrence. Although word count was important, it was not sufficient evidence to prove the outcome that the students were "able to be themselves in English. . . (49)." In fact, the number of words the students knew and what parts of speech they used had very little to do with their ability to be themselves in writing. I even found that their performances on the TOEFL did not reflect that they

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were totally relaxed in their adopted language; it was not until they could manipulate syntax AND vocabulary that they even began to be able to craft their thoughts into standard English phrasing. I could not say with any certainty when my students were ever fluent enough to totally relax in their adopted language, so, for me, the Results and Discussion sections of the study (pp. 48-49) raised more questions than they answered.

The statement that ". . . it was obvious that their [the students] second writing 12 days later made more sense than the first ones" (49) seems to be the result of the report, but without actually presenting the evidence, the result is obvious only to the authors. I would like to have been provided some examples of the pre-and post writing tests, so the change was evident to me as a reader. Further, more analysis of the differences between the pre-and post-tests would help answer reader questions and help the readers see what the authors saw. In their discussion of word count, for example, I would like to hear about *how* the word count shows improvement. The chart (49) shows that two of the three students' use of verbs increased. Evidence of improvement would be to compare how the students' use of the verbs more closely met standards of verb use in the post-test than in the pre-test. Did their word count increase demonstrate that their use of past tenses went beyond the simple past? In the verbs they used, were their use of tense, number, and gender appropriate to the linguistic environment?

Then, I would like to see the discussion go beyond word count to look for growth in syntax. An examination of the syntax would show if their positioning of verbs in the predicate was correct. If there was a question in the writing, did the students invert word order in accordance with English rules? Positioning adjectives can also be problematic for non-native speakers. Did the adjectives agree with their nouns? Were the articles (*the, a,* and *an*) positioned properly in front of the noun, and were they appropriate for pointing out general or specific nouns? Did they use *a* before consonant sounds and *an* before vowel sounds? Did the conjunctions distinguish relationships between the ideas expressed in the clauses? Did pronouns agree with the antecedents in number? Fluency determinations are made from measuring how closely these patterns match the patterns of educated writers of standard English, not by word counts alone.

I very much appreciated the article, as far as it went. I only wish that it had gone deeper into the working of the program itself and how students benefitted from social immersion as a whole, or I wish it had been more fully developed along the thread of how as a direct result of the program, student writing improved. Perhaps a next step is to assess the learning of all students in the program to see if the success of this one small group extends across all of them latitudinally. A longitudinal study of several years' worth of data might reveal some interesting results, too. Following any of these possible threads, or all of them, would result in a richly satisfying and enlightening article on providing learning assistance to learners of English as an additional language. I would look forward to reading about any additional insights the writers might be willing to provide about the outcomes of the program.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION :
Teaching Students to "Cook": Promoting Writing in the First Year Experience Course

Note: This article is the second of a two-part series. The first article, Teaching Students to "Cook": Promoting Reading in the First Year Experience Course, by Patsy A. Self Trand and Charlene Eberly, was published in the "Join the Conversation" segment of TLAR's Fall 2009 issue 14 (2). That article briefly reviewed the research on the two models of First Year Experience courses and the predominant finding that the learning strategy intervention model produces better retention results than the academic socialization model. Thus, with academics becoming the focus for FYE curriculum, the discussion moved to the importance of critical thinking for academic and professional success and the need to expand instruction in its two primary exponents: reading and writing. Whereas the first article concentrated on critical reading, this article focuses on writing excellence.

Charlene Eberly
Patsy A. Self Trand
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Abstract

This paper is a continuation of a previous article, "Teaching Students to 'Cook': Promoting Reading in the First Year Experience Course," The Learning Assistance Review 14 (2), on the importance of teaching critical thinking through the foundational skills of analytical reading and writing within the First Year Experience (FYE) course. With its vital role in retention, the FYE course must do more than just whet students' academic appetites; it must begin the process of teaching them to "cook" for themselves. This paper promotes the concept of writing excellence and offers specific ways to incorporate it into an FYE class. Descriptions are given for two common writing activities and one new technique, with a sample lesson plan and descriptive statistics from post-lesson surveys of FYE students.

One of the goals of higher education is to promote lifelong learning (Pintrich, McKeachie, & Lin, 1987). Post secondary institutions seek to prepare students for both short-term academic success and a lifetime of intellectual growth and professional success. In pursuit of these goals, institutions must teach critical thinking and its natural exponents:

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critical reading and writing excellence. It is not enough to give students food for thought; they must be taught to "cook" (Trand & Eberly, 2009). In the academy, the First Year Experience (FYE) class is Cooking 101, and every student is a potential master chef.

Yet, to produce gourmet chefs—rather than mere cooks—institutions of higher education must do more than seek to insure that students are well versed in their specific areas of study; academic institutions must see that students are able to make intellectual connections and express and apply their knowledge in real-life situations and contexts. Accordingly, FYE classes are being restructured to add more foundational academic content (Skipper, 2002, as cited in Ryan & Glenn, 2004). Specifically, many FYE courses are being expanded in terms of increased contact or credit hours in order to develop the curriculum in key academic skill areas such as critical reading and advanced writing or writing excellence and to provide opportunities for students to put these skills into practice.

Fortunately for administrators and educators seeking to add reading and writing to the FYE curriculum, this course restructuring is not only possible, but it is also relatively uncomplicated. Reading and writing skills can be taught in any context, directed towards any purpose, and designed for any audience. Metacognitive by nature, both reading and writing can readily be employed within the context of the socialization and the academic orientation of students, the two primary tasks of the FYE class.

The connections between reading and writing are well established, and the line between them is often blurred. "Strong readers tend to be strong writers, and struggling writers are often poor readers" (Griswold, 2006, p. 60). In academic learning or resource centers offering reading and writing tutoring, students often move freely between the reading tutor and writing consultant as they research, read and annotate material, plan papers, and revise them. The recursive nature of the writing process often leads students to return to the research and reading stages as their papers develop. Key to both reading and writing success is critical thinking.

Background

The ability to think critically is a shared goal of both composition and FYE classes. In addition, writing pedagogy emphasizes a holistic approach, which is in line with FYE pedagogy and its focus on both the academic and the social development of students. The reflective nature of writing and the view of writing as a recursive process, not a product, dovetail perfectly with the FYE course's promotion of active learning or learning by inquiry. Asked what the first year of college would have been like if there had not been so much writing, one Harvard freshman summed it up: "If I hadn't written, I would have felt as if I was just being fed a lot of information. My papers are my opportunity to think…" (Sommers and Saltz, 2004, p.128). Writing is more than a way of reporting ideas; it is a way of working out and refining ideas.

Many of the current trends in FYE course design or re-design are aligned with the best practices of the composition classroom. FYE curriculum innovations or renovations include service learning; learning communities; "clustering" or the grouping of courses; frontloading or "putting the strongest,

most student-centered people, programs, and services in the freshman year" (Levitz & Noel, 1989, as cited in Crissman, 2002, p. 138); academic themes; and the facilitation of connections — to faculty, peers, and the institution. Writing lends itself well to these and other FYE methodologies and can be employed in a wide variety of projects —in and out of the classroom. Writing can be on topics related to students' shared majors or larger institutional themes. Not only can composition classes be clustered with FYE classes, they frequently are. Finally, with its emphasis on feedback, the composition classroom provides many opportunities for making connections.

Writing's focus on rhetoric and analysis makes it highly adaptable. Accordingly, writing instruction can be put to work in any number of ways in the FYE classroom. It can be a component of a service learning project, it can be directed towards a common reading or larger academic theme, it can be used to report on an activity, and it can be applied to FYE topics related to academic socialization or extended orientation goals. Activities borrowed from composition classrooms — brainstorming, topic development, and peer review, for example — can serve such FYE goals as fostering critical thinking, promoting learning by inquiry, and facilitating connections. Undergraduate writing programs, writing centers, and centers for pedagogical excellence are all potential resources for FYE instructors looking for assistance in developing writing assignment guidelines and creating appropriate rubrics.

Method

At a large, urban public university in the southeastern United States, several writing activities were incorporated into the FYE class by the instructor who also taught writing at the undergraduate and graduate level and served as the faculty administrator of the university's writing center. Activities included the standard response paper, used in many classes and disciplines including FYE classes; "Going to the Wall," a common activity in the composition classroom; and "Parking Spots," a new method developed by the instructor and refined in the writing center over many years.

Participants

A total of 39 Students from two separate FYE classes participated in this study in the spring and summer semesters of 2009. One FYE course consisted of 19 pre-medical majors (the same group who participated in a reading study). The other FYE course included 20 students from a range of majors. The first group of students was taught the "Parking Spots" technique, and the second group of students participated in the "Going to the Wall" writing activity. Both groups of students completed assessment surveys on their respective writing activities.

Procedure

Writing Assignment: The Response Paper

A fairly common incorporation of writing into the FYE course is the response paper.   Students are asked to write a response paper in which they report and reflect on an independent or class activity.   When FYE classes are clustered with a freshman composition course — formally, through a Freshman Interest Group (FIG), or informally, through students' independent enrollment in both courses simultaneously—the possibility to

develop the response paper in the English classroom exists. In this scenario, the response paper may even serve as the impetus for an extended writing project. For example, a response paper on a jazz concert could develop into a larger paper on the history of jazz.

With help from the writing center or other writing resources on campus, FYE instructors and students can get assistance to take the response paper assignment from a fairly mundane task to an opportunity to learn beyond the classroom (see sample response paper lesson plan).

Lesson Summary		Response Paper
Objectives		
	Content	The students will learn about (the topic or subject) and be able to think and write critically about that subject.
	Social	The students will enhance their knowledge of the social aspects of the general topic or theme (such as collegiate sports or diversity) and be able to think and write critically about the relations between the topic and themselves, other texts, and the world.
	Process	The students will engage in an independent writing activity where they report, analyze, and reflect on the activity and topic.
	Affective	The students will enjoy the experience of learning about the topic, understand its relationship to themselves, other texts, and the world, and appreciate the writing experience.
Procedures		A. Students attend FYE class and participate in discussions about the general activity theme or larger topic. Students are told to keep an activity notebook. B. During the topic presentation, students are encouraged to take notes on the discussion and record their ideas in their notebooks. C. Outside of class, students are to attend the assigned class activity or their choice of activity and record notes and observations. D. As an out-of-class assignment, students are instructed to write a response paper that is (1) a summary of the content of the topic/activity, not to exceed one half the paper and (2) analysis/comments/reflections on the activity, which should comprise the second half. Students are instructed to comment on: • Connections of the major ideas to themselves, texts, and the world. • Applications for change and suggestions for improvement.
Assessment Objective		Were the students able to: • Learn about the topic; • Enhance their knowledge of the social aspects and be able to think and write critically about the relations of the topic to themselves, other texts, and the world; • Engage in the writing process and produce an appropriate and well-written response paper.
Accommodations for second language students/students with language deficiencies, disabilities in writing, or language acquisition.		During the general topic and larger theme presentation, visuals and re-tellings are to be included. To develop possible activity ideas, the "Going to the Wall" activity can be utilized during class discussion.

Figure 1. Sample Response Paper Lesson Plan

Instructors can get help in creating guidelines for the writing assignment and a grading rubric with clear criteria. Students are guided in the process of reflecting on and analyzing the experience; making connections between

the activity and their academic and social lives; structuring the response paper; and expressing their ideas using a formal academic writing style and format. In what can only be seen as icing on the cake, the introduction to the writing center achieves part of the FYE goal of academic socialization or acclimation to the academic environment and the many resources it offers (see Assignment Guidelines).

Assignment Guidelines: Response Paper

Independent Activity: University Art Museum – Self-guided Sculpture Tour*
(*This activity counts as one of your 3 independent activities/university resources for the class.)

Your assignment is to write a 2-page response paper on the art/sculpture you saw. (Exile art piece with people behind bars, silver "windmill"-looking piece, large black cube that moved, large bronze depicting the warped world, and the large piece made by vertical rusty steel beams.)

Your paper should consist of two parts:

Response
A response paper details your "response" to something: in this case, the art. Do not focus on descriptions of the pieces (we all saw them, too), other than what is needed to identify them and to make your points. Some questions that may guide your response include the following: What did you like? What did you not like? What did the art "say" to you? Do you like sculpture? Does it engage you? How do we engage differently with art that we can touch, that is three-dimensional?

Extra points will be awarded for correct / relevant use of the following terms *in relation to the work we saw*: "tactile," "kinetic," "relief," "constructed," "patina," and "element of danger."

Analysis/Synthesis
Go beyond the immediate experience and discuss the sculpture, and its presence in the public venue of your university, from a larger perspective. Some questions that may guide your analysis include the following: Who does art belong to? Why is it important that art be available for public consumption (or why not)? Does art have a meaning or is it just intended to attract, repulse, or stimulate us in some way? If there is meaning, is it determined by the artist or the viewer? Is art primarily a visual experience? Should art be seen and not touched? How does the tactile/physical nature of sculpture affect our response to it? Does it add another dimension of meaning? As three-dimensional beings, do we respond to three-dimensional art differently?
The sky is the limit here. Take your observations, add your analysis, and give us something to think about....

Paper should be typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins only, and in a clear readable font like Times New Roman. The top left corner of the page should have your name, the class name, and the date. Give your paper a title that expresses your overall response to sculpture and/or the university's sculpture park at the museum.

Please use appropriate language and proofread your papers thoroughly. Organize the paper so it is not just a bunch of randomly connected responses to the prompt questions or isolated observations.

Figure 2. Assignment Guidelines

For the two methods studied —"Going to the Wall" and "Parking Spots" — students in two separate classes were given instruction in one of the methods followed by in-class practice of the technique with instructor

direction. A post-lesson survey was taken in each class at the next class meeting; students were asked to evaluate the method.

Writing Activity 1: "Going to the Wall"

A popular composition class pre-writing activity designed to help students develop paper topics that are high interest, scale and scope appropriate, and accessible in terms of research realities is often referred to as "Going to the Wall." The "Going to the Wall" writing activity can be used whether the final outcome is an individual paper or a class paper, project, or presentation. Topics can be assigned or chosen by the students. An active learning experience, "Going to the Wall" involves students putting rough topic ideas on large sheets of paper affixed to the classroom wall. With markers in hand, students move around the room and list questions and comments relative to the various topics on the sheets of paper. The questions may show the need for further clarification or development of the topic, indicate the audience's knowledge or knowledge gaps on the topic, reflect biases and misconceptions, or just reveal what answers readers will expect to find in a paper on the topic. In small groups or full class discussion, the topics and the comments and questions written below them are evaluated and refined. Instructors can assist by providing direction and proposing possible angles for inquiry. By the end of the class, students should have a workable topic and several potential lines of inquiry as well as a good sense of the amount of background information their audience will require.

In an FYE class with a common reading on the theme of diversity, for example, students might each select a particular immigrant population (perhaps related to their own ancestry or country of origin) and explore that group's culture, language, history, and contributions in America. The instructor might also encourage students to address stereotypes and misconceptions about the immigrant group, or these could be explored in class discussion as part of the larger goal of fostering critical thinking and acceptance. Alternatively, the class could collectively look at the contributions of one group—such as Irish immigrants—and individuals or teams could develop various research subtopics such as the Irish famine and the resulting wave of emigration/immigration to America; immigrants' settlement patterns and paths; or Irish cultural contributions in food, music, trade, or traditions.

In an FYE class clustered with math and chemistry or a pre-med FIG, students might be given the general theme of pharmaceutical research and development. Students would then choose individual research topics related to their interests or majors, such as the statistical chances of success for a drug in development; the ethics of conducting drug trials that include placebos; or the chemical makeup of a drug. When students select the topics and the topics are related to their interests, the likelihood of success increases.

"The Wall" assignment involves active learning, peer review and feedback, guided discussion, and reflection. The physical nature of the activity breaks up the routine of class and engages students. Students maintain ownership of their topics and ideas while receiving feedback that helps them narrow or redirect their topic as needed. Instructors can function as coaches, calling

out questions—rhetorical and actual—remarking on student comments as they are written, and encouraging students to think critically about the topics, including subsequent possibilities for research and development. Finally, students remove their respective papers from the wall and leave with a tangible guide for their papers.

Specific to this study, an FYE class of 20 students that was part of a non-specific FIG (one not grouped by academic major) used the "Going to the Wall" activity to develop their small group paper topics related to their FYE text's chapter on Sexual Health. With selected topics of "Safe Sex Practices," "Sex and Alcohol," and "Date Rape," students went to "the Wall" to ask questions, share ideas, and record both what they knew and what they wanted to know about the topics. After they finished, papers were removed from the wall and taken back to the students' small groups for discussion. The activity generated lively discussions, and working from the papers, student groups planned their research. At the next class session, students were asked to complete an evaluation of the Wall activity.

Writing Activity 2: Constructing a Paper using "Parking Spots"

When students come to the writing center with their marked paper drafts or graded papers, one frequently seen instructor's comment is some version of "paper lacks structure and organization." When students are subsequently asked by writing consultants to produce their original paper outlines and are unable to do so, the problem often becomes clear. Creating a separate outline first before commencing writing the paper is incongruous with the way students write today. The vast majority of students write on computers and begin with a title page or page one of the paper; thus, the idea of a supplemental document or an outline overlay is both unrealistic and unlikely. In recognition of that fact and spurred by the need to help students organize and structure their papers, this writing center administrator came up with the idea of "Parking Spots," a new writing technique that can be used for any kind of writing project. In addition to creating an active outline within the paper, the "Parking Spots" technique combats several other common writing problems: inadequate research depth and breadth, incorporation of outside sources and plagiarism, and procrastination/time management. "Parking Spots" can be used by the FYE instructor to begin the process of introducing students to formal academic, and thus, structured, writing. "Parking Spots" help students transition from critical reading and research to the writing and revision process.

In essence, students can develop an active outline within their papers by creating "Parking Spots," essentially place markers within the blank pages of the unwritten paper. These pre-designated sections provide physical places within the electronic document for students to "park" ideas and information—their own and those from outside sources, which can later be removed or adapted into headings. Developing the parking spots helps students plan their papers and demystifies the writing process by breaking it down into manageable steps. Rather than viewing the paper as a daunting task and writing as the final step or product of their research, students come to view writing as a process and the paper as a construction project. The paper is built, rather than written in one relatively direct outpouring of ideas.

This approach fits perfectly into the composition classroom's goal of teaching students the value of rhetorical analysis, reflection, and revision.

In addition to providing a rhetorical structure for the paper and encouraging students to adapt and revise that structure as needed, the parking spots method aids students in avoiding plagiarism and in evaluating the depth and value of their research and provides a realistic approach whereby the paper is written in sections whenever the muse strikes or time allows. Students read the source material and take reading notes, which they "park" under the appropriate parking spot. Later, students flesh out the paper by turning those reading notes into fully formed original prose, and because they are working from the "parked" notes rather than the original source texts, the possibility of plagiarism is greatly diminished.

As the students' ideas and outside source material are parked and the paper draft develops, students can evaluate the various parking spots and the material parked under those spots to see where additional research may be required. Finally, this method allows students to write sections that are ready to be written and to do so in relatively short periods of time rather than delaying until large blocks of time become available or the looming deadline forces them into an extended writing session, leaving little time for revision.

After explaining the "Parking Spots" method, instructors can introduce a hypothetical paper topic and assignment guidelines and use in-class computers or the chalk- or whiteboard to outline the hypothetical paper or come up with appropriate parking spots through class discussion and student suggestions. Using one or two pre-selected articles, the instructor can guide students through the process of reading and evaluating the articles and determining what ideas, statistics, or direct quotes the students wish to use in the class paper. The instructor then leads students in parking the selected material—with the applicable citations—under the requisite "Parking spots," primarily in the form of relatively rough notes rather than direct text citations. Finally, the instructor asks students to address one parking spot section, adding their ideas and words and turning the parked material into paraphrased text or, when appropriate, incorporating relevant direct quotes with the proper setup and citation. By using the bulk of the class period to provide hands-on practice with the technique, students walk away with the ability to put the method into immediate use.

Specific to this activity, an FYE class of 19 pre-medical students was introduced to the "Parking Spots" method using a full (75-minute) class session. First they received a 30 minute lecture on how to use the method, after which they were given copies of two articles and asked to put the technique into practice. Working together as a class, students "parked" ideas and information from the articles. In the next class period, students were given a re-teach of the method followed by a question-and-answer session. For their final paper, a response paper, students were asked to use the "Parking Spots" method when preparing their first draft. An evaluation of this method was included in the course evaluation.

Results

Writing Activity 1: "Going to the Wall"

Study results reveal that all students found the "Going to the Wall" activity method useful at least 75% of the time in all categories. They ranked the method highest for its usefulness in pinpointing areas requiring research, followed by its value in showing what is relevant to the intended audience, determining the topics' appropriateness, and defining and developing the topics. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics of the students' evaluation of the "Going to the Wall" writing activity (see Table 1).

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of FYE students' evaluations of the "Going to the Wall" activity

Question	N	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Range
The "Going to the Wall" exercise was helpful in defining and developing the topic.	20	4.40	4.50	0.73	3.00
The "Going to the Wall" exercise was helpful in determining whether the topic was an appropriate one for the assignment.	20	4.20	4.00	0.77	2.00
The "Going to the Wall" exercise was helpful in revealing what the intended audience knew and did not know about the topic.	20	4.50	5.00	0.61	2.00
The "Going to the Wall" exercise was helpful in determining areas or aspects of the topic that required research.	20	4.60	5.00	0.76	2.00

Note: Scoring guide is as follows: 1 = never; 2 = 25% of the time; 3 = 50% of the time; 4 = 75% of the time; 5 = almost all of the time and greater than 75% of the time.

The results of the evaluation suggest that students found the "Parking Spots" method similarly beneficial. In the usage study of the "Parking Spots" method, at least 84% of the students reported that they were either currently using or planned to use the technique for each of 5 different purposes. All of the students (100%) reported their intention to use or current use of the method as a means of creating an outline and avoiding plagiarism (see Table 2).

Table 2

Number and percentage of student evaluations of "Parking Spots" for present and future use, N=19

Strategy	Do not plan to adopt	Plan to adopt	Presently Using
Use to create an outline	0	15	4
	0.00%	78.9%	21.1%
Use to avoid plagiarism	0	16	3
	0.00%	84.2%	15.8%
Use to "attack" the paper/ avoid procrastination	3	10	6
	15.8%	52.6%	31.6%
Use to determine the need for further research	3	14	2
	15.8%	73.7%	10.5
Use to stay on task and organized	3	11	5
	15.8%	57.9%	26.3%

Asked to assess "Parking Spots" as a helpful method in general and specifically as a way of organizing papers, managing outside source material, avoiding plagiarism, and directing research, students reported finding it helpful at least 75% or more of the time in every category. "Parking Spots" gained its highest support as a systematic or incremental approach, making writing papers easier in terms of time management and task completion. Notably, even the category receiving the lowest support—the use of "Parking Spots" as a method to determine the sufficiency of the research and to direct additional research—earned a minimum score of 4.1, which is 75% of the time.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Student Evaluation of the Writing "Parking Spots" Technique, N=19

Question	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Range
Do you feel that "parking spots" method of building a paper by "parking" information and ideas under headings as you plan and write your paper will be helpful in your academic career?	4.37	4.00	0.60	2.00
By creating a plan for your paper and setting up sections or "parking spots," do you feel your papers will be better organized?	4.26	4.00	0.65	2.00
By creating a plan for your paper and setting up sections or "parking spots," do you think it will be easier for you to manage your source material (books and articles) and integrate that outside material into your paper?	4.16	4.00	0.69	2.00
By using "parking spots" method and thus, an incremental or bit by bit approach, do you thing it will be easier to write your paper in terms of time management and getting it done?	4.37	5.00	0.76	2.00
Do you think the "parking spots" method will help you avoid plagiarism because you will be looking at rough reading notes ("parked") notes and not the original articles/books while you are writing?	4.32	4.00	0.75	2.00
Do you think using the "parking spots" method of outlining a paper and "parking" source material from your research will help direct your research and show you where you have good material and where you need to do more research?	4.10	4.00	0.88	3.00

Note. Scoring guide: 1 = never; 2 = 25% of the time; 3 = 50% of the time; 4 = 75% of the time; 5 = almost all of the time and greater than 75% of the time.

Discussion

The results of the studies clearly show students' appreciation of the "Going to the Wall" activity and the "Parking Spots" technique. Both studies report students' views of the methods as useful in terms of their planned or present usage, with all responses exceeding 75%. Significantly, students' responses indicate their recognition of the techniques' value for both the short-term (getting the assigned papers done) and for the longer term of their academic careers. The metacognitive nature of that recognition can itself be seen as a sign of the techniques' value.

"Going to the Wall" appeared to be a successful technique.   The mean score in all of the categories was slightly above 4, which equates to current or planned usage of 75% of the time or more. Relative to the stated goal of teaching students to "cook" or think critically, it was interesting to note that students felt the exercise was particularly helpful in determining areas or aspects of the topic that required research.   This category earned the highest rating, almost a "5," indicating current or planned use of "almost

all of the time and greater than 75% of the time." The standard deviation of the scores for this category was .76 indicating that virtually all of the students agreed with the finding. This is significant because research is directed inquiry, and as such, it is the basic white sauce of the academic cooking school.

The adoption survey results on the use of "Parking Spots" as a writing or pre-writing strategy are remarkable. For both the question on using the method as a means of creating an outline and the question on using the method as a means of avoiding plagiarism, all students surveyed affirmed the technique's value, indicating that they plan to adopt or were already using the "Parking Spots" technique taught to them earlier in the semester. None of the students indicated that they did not plan to adopt the strategy for these purposes. As with the "Going to the Wall" technique, students saw the value of "Parking Spots" as a tool for research-related assignments. Approximately 85% of the students acknowledged the technique's usefulness as a tool to determine the need for further research by responding to the question on research that they either were using or planned to adopt the technique. This finding should be of particular interest to institutions with what the Carnegie Foundation classifies as "high research activity."

Again, as in the survey on "Going to the Wall," students reported finding the "Parking Spots" to be very helpful. Students rated each question on the technique's value with a minimum of "4," indicating that they found the method useful at least 75% of the time for each stated purpose. There were two categories that earned slightly higher ratings than the others and each of them had a small spread — .60 and .76 respectively — indicating close consensus. First, students reported finding the technique of parking information and ideas under headings as they plan and write papers to be helpful in their academic careers. Accordingly, students not only saw the planning value of the method, but they also recognized that they can transfer it to other disciplines. Reports on using "Parking Spots" as a time management tool were also somewhat higher than those on the other uses. This suggests that students may be becoming more proactive in planning their time and their work, thereby reducing the last-minute paper writing cram sessions in which little "cooking" occurs, and the resulting papers are often mediocre meals at best.

Recommendations for Future Study

Introducing writing instruction into the FYE course is not a novel idea, nor is it an idea whose value would be disputed by administrators, faculty, or students. The issue is implementation. The realities of the FYE course dictate what can be accomplished within it. Research needs to be done to establish the present realities of the course. How many credits are offered for the class? Is there an established text, and what is the prescribed curriculum? Is service learning being incorporated? What percentage of courses is taught by non-faculty? When the course is taught by faculty, what percentage of the instructors has any background in English?

Armed with current data on the instructional realities of the course, researchers should study various strategies for introducing pre-writing and writing activities within the context of the course's academic socialization and learning strategies agendas. Collaborations to support writing should

be made with the library, the English composition or undergraduate writing program, the reading lab, and the writing center, and these collaborations should be studied to determine their success. Additionally, specific activities, such as "Going to the Wall" or using "Parking Spots," should be studied for their effectiveness and possible inclusion in the best practices for the introduction of writing curriculum into the FYE course.

Conclusion

The concept of writing excellence goes beyond the ability to express oneself in writing clearly, correctly, and concisely. Achieving writing excellence demands more: it involves creative, expressive, persuasive, and powerful writing mastery. If academic institutions want to embrace writing excellence as a goal for their students, the responsibility for accomplishing that goal cannot be borne solely by freshman composition classes and the undergraduate writing program. Writing instruction and application must be incorporated into every class, and the FYE class is the natural starting point. FYE classes must lay the foundation for academic excellence by providing the tools students need to succeed, both in college and in life. In so doing, student "chefs" will not only develop the skills to navigate the academic kitchen and sustain themselves throughout college, but also the expertise to create the gourmet feast of a rich and productive life.

Bon appétit!

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TUTORING: A Support Strategy for At-risk Students

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Abstract

A longitudinal research study was conducted at a public university in Pennsylvania on a sample of 129 at-risk students from a state-funded program (Act 101) designed to provide support services for economically and educationally disadvantaged students. This research employed a non-experimental, ex post facto methodology to assess the impact of tutoring on persistence, retention, and graduation. Study variables included measures of academic performance, retention, use and frequency of tutoring, the number of years in college, gender, and total credits earned toward graduation. Data were analyzed with t-tests, chi-square tests, multivariate and multiple regressions, and logistic regression. Results of the study showed that tutoring had significant positive relationships with retention and academic performance and demonstrate that tutoring can be effective as a strategy for succeeding to graduation.

Tutoring as a mode of instruction has a long history in higher education. Early European colleges, royalty, and the upper classes used tutoring as one of the primary forms of instruction, and such instruction continued well into the 19th and early 20th centuries across most of Europe and the United States (Gordon & Gordon, 1990). In many colleges today, tutoring continues to be an integral part of academic support programs designed for the general student population. Academic support programs often target at-risk students, such as those likely to drop out of college due to inadequate preparation.

Despite the extensive use by higher education of tutoring as a mode of instruction and as a learning strategy, few comprehensive studies have assessed the benefits derived from tutoring. A review of the literature suggests that some indirect effects achieved by tutoring include persistence, academic achievement, retention, and degree attainment (Astin, 1993; Rheinheimer & Mann, 2000; Rouche & Snow, 1977).

The expansion of equal educational access programs throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s resulted in increased enrollment of students from diverse racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds. Consequently, governmental policy makers and educators developed, funded, and instituted programs designed to reduce attrition and increase retention of underserved and sometimes underprepared students. This was done primarily through the implementation of comprehensive developmental/remedial programs designed to enhance fundamental academic skills of at-risk students. These programs increased students' persistence and retention (Boylan, Bliss, & Bonham, 1993; Kulik, C., Kulik, J., & Shwalb, 1983; Vallone, Reid, Umali, & Pohlert, 2003).

Today, most higher education institutions have some form of academic support programs, most especially tutoring and advisory services. Theorists posit that tutoring enhances mastery of subject matter, thereby boosting academic self-efficacy, and increasing persistence and retention (Astin, 1993, 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005).

Background and Research Findings

The literature on undergraduates' persistence, retention, and graduation rates indicates that tutoring (peer, professional, and supplemental) plays a crucial role in undergraduates' sense of social and academic integration (Astin, 1984, 1993; Bean & Eaton, 2001; Riggio, Fantuzzo, Connelly & Dimeff, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Tinto, 1987, 1993, 2000). Peer, professional, drop-in, and Supplemental Instruction are an integral part of the learning strategy of higher education.

Peer and professional tutoring are highly utilized tools of college and university academic support services. Research shows that peer tutors who possess high cognitive abilities are more likely to volunteer and/or be hired as tutors (Astin, 1993; Topping, 1996; Topping, Watson, Jarvis, & Hill, 1996). Presumably, these students are excellent role models, and at-risk students are more likely to emulate the good study habits and attitudes of their peer tutors (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). However, studies show that at-risk students are less likely to seek help when they need it (Bandura, 1986; Zimmerman, 2000; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). Therefore, educators must encourage and empower at-risk students to utilize tutoring early in the matriculation process.

This early intervention draws at-risk students into the college and university community, facilitating connections that foster student persistence, retention, and degree attainment (Fisher, 2007; Tinto, 1987, 1993). Further research reveals that early academic success promotes students' self-concept and self-efficacy, leading to the development of self-regulation skills (Pejares, 1997; Schunk, 1991; Collins, 2007; Zimmerman, 1990, 2000, 2002; Zimmerman et al., 1992). Once this occurs, students are more likely to seek help when they need it (Bandura, 1997).

Peer and professional tutors, who are trained in interpersonal and effective communication skills, are well positioned to articulate their duties, responsibilities, and expectations to undergraduates, providing clear parameters for what the undergraduate can expect from the tutoring

experience. Tutees are reminded that they are responsible for their education and they should attend and be prepared for scheduled tutoring sessions. If tutees come to their sessions prepared, one of the immediate benefits is the increase in knowledge gains and academic achievement. Studies show that good grades reduce dropouts and stopouts and serve as one of the best predictors for academic success (Astin, Keup, & Lindholm, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Another support strategy is Supplemental Instruction (SI), which utilizes trained leaders who serve as facilitators/tutors and are either upper class students or professional tutors (National Center for Supplemental Instruction, 1997). Supplemental Instruction leaders traditionally attend the courses along with the students, taking notes, reading texts, and providing positive feedback and content explanation to tutees through small group help sessions (Arendale, 1994; Burmeister, 1995; Eig, 1997).

The literature shows that SI positively impacts short-term persistence, especially from first to second year, while also improving the passing grades of students in higher education's historically difficult courses, such as chemistry and psychology (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Visor, Johnson, Schollaet, Good-Majah, & Davenport, 1995). Additionally, SI appears to promote academic and social integration, which is crucial to the academic performance of undergraduate students in general and to at-risk students in particular.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the ability to acknowledge the benefits of tutoring on persistence, retention, and graduation, few studies assess the measurable impact of tutoring as a support strategy for at-risk students. The problem is complicated by the evidence that at-risk students are less likely to seek help when they need it. A strategy must be developed to empower at-risk students to seek academic assistance when they need it.

Act 101 Programs in Pennsylvania provide support services for economically and educationally disadvantaged students enrolled in higher education institutions throughout the state. These at-risk students enter college with the potential to succeed, but they lack the skills and background necessary to survive the rigors of academic life. The support services offered to these students include counseling and tutoring, and many of the students attend summer bridge programs prior to enrollment for their freshmen year. Tutoring is advocated for Act 101 students as an important academic assistance strategy that should be requested early in the semester.

The purpose of this article is to inform readers of the results of research on the academic performance of at-risk students from an Act 101 Program at one university in Pennsylvania. This research employs a non-experimental, ex post facto methodology to assess the impact of tutoring on persistence, retention, and graduation. The variables in the student sample include measures of academic performance, use and frequency of

tutoring, graduation rate, the number of years in college, gender, and total credits earned toward graduation. Little published research exists that links these variables to, or that shows the impact of support service programs on, student academic success.

Method

Sample

The sample consisted of incoming Act 101 students from the 1999, 2000, and 2001 summer bridge programs at a public university in Pennsylvania. A total of 129 students were tracked for the three cohort years, 1999-2001, through to graduation or withdrawal from college. Only students who made it through the summer programs and returned for at least one semester were tracked. The student sample consisted of 64 males and 65 females, with 25 of the students graduating and 103 of the students withdrawing from college.

Students were able to request tutors in as many subjects as they desired, as long as they were enrolled in the classes. To request a tutor, students needed to complete an application, which were available in the Learning Center where the tutoring was conducted. Detailed databases are maintained each semester by the tutoring staff for all tutoring data, including requests for tutors, tutors assigned to students, and dates when requests are made and assigned. These databases provided all the tutoring data needed for this study. For each student, the number of subjects in which students were assigned tutors was recorded for each semester the students were enrolled. Student records were examined to collect academic information and to identify students who graduated or withdrew from college.

Procedure

Both descriptive and inferential procedures were used to analyze the data collected on the students, which included data compiled from the tutoring databases and academic performance data (grade point averages, credits earned toward graduation, and number of years of study) gathered from student records. Means, standard deviations, and correlations provided the descriptive analyses, while t-tests, chi-square tests, multivariate and multiple regressions, and logistic regression were utilized to conduct inferential analyses. Logistic regression was used to examine the effect of predictors on graduation. This procedure determines the relationship between independent and dependent variables when the dependent variable is dichotomous, such as whether or not a student graduated. The level of significance, a, for all statistical tests was set at .05, and all statistical analyses were conducted with the SAS statistical package.

Results

For the purposes of this study, variable names were created to more efficiently describe the dataset. The variable names and their descriptions are TUTRTOTL (total number of courses in which each student was assigned tutors), GPA (student's cumulative grade point average), TCTG (total number of credits earned toward graduation), TUTORED (whether or not a

student was tutored), STATUS (whether a student graduated or withdrew), YOS (number of years in college), and GENDER (student's gender).

The results of selected data analyses are given in Tables 1 through 5. Significant results were found for correlations between TUTRTOTL, GPA, TCTG, and YOS (Table 1). We would expect GPA, TCTG, and YOS to be significantly correlated with each other, but the significant correlations between TUTRTOTL and GPA, TUTRTOTL and TCTG, and TUTRTOTL and YOS are important results for tutoring.

Table 1

Intercorrelations Between Selected Study Variables (N = 129)

	TUTRTOTL	GPA	TCTG	YOS
TUTRTOTL	--	.185[*]	.504[***]	.520[***]
GPA		--	.606[***]	.534[***]
TCTG			--	.964[***]
YOS				--

Note. TUTRTOTL = the total number of tutoring requests per student; GPA = the student's cumulative grade point average; TCTG = the total number of credits earned toward graduation; YOS = the number of years in college. *p < .05. ***p < .0001.

Table 2 gives the results for two contingency tables, STATUS by TUTORED and GENDER by TUTORED. A significant association was found between STATUS and TUTORED, but not between GENDER and TUTORED. The significance of the STATUS by TUTORED table can be attributed to the very small number of students (one) who graduated and were not tutored, as opposed to the proportion of students who withdrew and were not tutored. Based on the odds ratio for this table, students who were tutored were 13.5 times more likely to graduate than students who were not tutored.

Table 2

The Contingency Tables for the Status of Students (Graduated or Withdrew) and Gender Crossed with Whether or Not Students Were Tutored

	Tutored	Not Tutored
Status[1]		
Withdrew	68	35
Graduated	25	1
Gender[2]		
Female	47	18
Male	46	18

[1]$\chi^2(1)=9.37$, p < .01. [2]$\chi^2(1) = 0.00$, p > .05.

In Table 3, the variables TUTRTOTL, GPA, and YOS are grouped by STATUS and compared with t-tests. The results of these t-test comparisons reveal significant differences in favor of students who graduated for all three variables, the total number of courses in which each student was assigned tutors (TUTRTOTL), GPA, and the number of years in college (YOS).

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics and t-Test Comparisons for the Variables TUTRTOTL, GPA, and YOS Grouped by STATUS.

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	t-score	F-ratio
TUTRTOTL	103	3.11	3.70	0.00	16.0	5.19**	2.46*
	26	9.31	5.81	0.00	27.0		
GPA	103	1.80	0.68	0.17	3.33	9.13**	3.07*
	26	2.72	0.39	2.07	3.80		
YOS	103	1.32	0.51	1.00	3.00	18.20**	3.68**
	26	4.92	0.98	1.00	6.00		

Note. The first line for each variable represents the statistics for students who withdrew, and the second line is for students who graduated. $^*p < .05.$ $^{**}p < .001.$

Because the dependent variables for the regression analyses were correlated, a multivariate regression analysis was conducted to determine if one or more significant regressions existed. The multivariate regression analysis showed overall significance (Wilk's $\wedge=0.72$, $F(4,250)=11.10$, p<.001); therefore, follow-up regression analyses were conducted for the effects of predictors GENDER and TUTRTOTL on GPA and TCTG. These regressions found TUTRTOTL to be a significant predictor for both dependent variables (Table 4). The logistic regression analysis in Table 5 showed TUTRTOTL to be a significant predictor for STATUS.

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that tutoring significantly improves students' academic performance and retention. The correlations in Table 1 show the significant positive associations between the total number of courses in which each student was assigned tutors (TUTRTOTL) and student's cumulative grade point average (GPA), total number of credits earned toward graduation (TCTG), and the number of years in college (YOS). The first contingency table (Table 2) shows the significant association between being tutored (TUTORED) and graduating (STATUS). The impact of this association is more clearly expressed by the odds ratio, which reveals that students who were tutored were 13.5 times more likely to graduate than students who were not tutored — an overwhelming endorsement for tutoring.

The t-test comparisons in Table 3 provide additional evidence for the effectiveness of tutoring. Students who graduated made significantly (p< .001) more requests for tutors than students who withdrew from school. On average, students who graduated ($\bar{x}=9.31$) were assigned over six more tutors per semester than students who withdrew from college ($\bar{x}=3.11$).

The regression analyses in Tables 4 and 5 provide the strongest evidence for the positive effect of tutoring, with the total number of courses in which each student was assigned tutors (TUTRTOTL) emerging as a significant

predictor in all three regressions. In the first two regressions (Table 4), TUTRTOTL was a significant predictor for student's cumulative grade point average (GPA) and the total number of credits earned toward graduation (TCTG), two indicators of academic performance. In the third analysis (Table 5), a logistic regression, TUTRTOTL was a highly significant predictor for whether a student graduated or withdrew (STATUS).

Table 4

The Linear Regression Models with GPA and TCTG as the Dependent Variables and TUTRTOTL and GENDER as the Predictors (N = 129).

Dependent Variable	Predictor	B	$SE\ B$	β
GPA				
	Constant	1.87***	0.11	
	TUTRTOTL	0.03*	0.01	0.18*
	GENDER	-0.02	0.13	-0.01
TCTG				
	Constant	22.8***	4.25	
	TUTRTOTL	4.28***	0.65	0.50***
	GENDER	-2.89	6.33	-0.04

Note. B = unstandardized beta coefficients. SE = standard error of beta. β= standardized beta coefficients. For GPA model R^2 = .03. For TCTG model R^2 = .26. *p < .05. ***p < .0001.

Table 5

The Stepwise Logistic Regression Model with STATUS as the Dependent Variable and TUTRTOTL as the Predictor (N = 129).

| Variable | $B\ (SE)$ | 95 % | C I | f o r | $Exp(B)$ |
		Lower	$Exp(B)$	Upper	
Constant	-2.90*** (0.45)				
TUTRTOTL	0.27*** (0.06)	1.17	1.31	1.46	

Note. B = unstandardized beta coefficients. SE = standard error of beta. $Exp(B)$ = e, the base of natural logarithms, raised to the power of B. R^2 = .34 (Nagelkerke). Model $\chi^2_{(1)}$ = 31.57, p < .0001. Hosmer and Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test statistic = 6.35, p < .39. ***p < .0001.

Although the regression between TUTRTOTL and GPA is weak (R^2 = .03), the regression models between TUTRTOTL and TCTG and TUTRTOTL and STATUS are strong for behavioral studies, accounting for 26% and 34% of the variability in TCTG and STATUS. The low R^2 value for the regression between TUTRTOTL and GPA is not surprising, however, because GPA is affected by numerous variables.

The parameters for the regression models provide additional insight into the impact of tutoring on the dependent measures. The value of the parameter (*B* value) for the linear regression with TCTG as the dependent variable, 4.28, indicates that the number of credits earned toward graduation increases this amount for every request for tutoring that a student makes. Multiplying the *B* value by the average number of requests for tutors, 9.31 (from Table 3), that students who graduated made shows that for students who graduated, tutoring translates to some 40 credits toward graduation.

The other statistic of interest is Exp(*B*) from Table 5. Exp(*B*) is *e*, the base of natural logarithms, raised to the power of *B*, the *B*-coefficient for the logistic regression, and is an indicator of the change in odds resulting from a unit change in the predictor, TUTRTOTL. For the population in this study, therefore, a student who requests tutoring is 1.31 times as likely to graduate as a student who does not request tutoring.

The findings from this study reinforce much of what was discussed in the literature review. Tutoring may improve one's persistence, retention, and graduation, and it behooves students to utilize tutoring to further promote academic success.

Although previous research has shown that women generally outperform men in terms of degree completion, gender was not a factor in this study. Women were not tutored proportionately any more than men (Table 2), and the absence of gender as a significant predictor in the regression analyses indicates that the academic performance and retention of women were no better than that of men. This might be attributed to the fact that Act 101 students are acculturated to take full advantage of tutoring, and that these students, both male and female, learn to take full responsibility for their own education.

Limitations and Recommendations

One obvious limitation is that the results of this study are restricted in application to the population of at-risk students at the university at which this study was conducted. While this is certainly very useful and most important for the university, and since many colleges and universities have equal opportunity programs similar to the Act 101 Program at this university, these findings may apply to numerous university settings. However, in order to make generalizations to a broad population, this study needs to be replicated to student samples from a variety of colleges and universities across different geographical regions. Additionally, students other than at-risk students should be included in such studies.

A second limitation to this research is that the study was restricted to just a few variables. As evidenced from the R^2 values in the regression models, there are additional variables to be considered for studies such as this. Even in the logistic regression model where the R^2 value, .34, was noticeably high for research involving humans, sixty-five per cent of the variability in the dependent variable, whether a student graduated or withdrew (STATUS), was unaccounted for. Replicating this study with additional variables included, such as subject area and some measure of academic self-efficacy, as well as the actual hours of tutoring that students received, would greatly enhance the value of any similarly conducted research.

Conclusions

When used effectively, tutoring can have a significant positive impact on the persistence, retention, and degree attainment for high risk students. The results of this study support this assertion and demonstrate that, for a local population of at-risk students, tutoring is effective as a strategy for succeeding to graduation. Educators need to encourage and facilitate undergraduates to seek help early, often, and, subsequently, to empower them to take control of their education.

The methodology of this study provides a format for other researchers who are interested in trying to link retention to tutoring or other possible predictors. Investigations such as this one are critical to establishing the necessity of tutoring and other academic support programs. It would also be helpful to discover why students who persisted with tutoring did so, and conversely, why some students chose not to persist with tutoring. Triangulating surveys, focus groups, and interviews with quantitative studies could provide much needed information about the efficacy of tutoring.

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BOOK REVIEW: *StrengthsFinder 2.0*

Rath, T. (2007). *StrengthsFinder 2.0*. New York, NY: Gallup Press.

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"At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day." According to research by the Gallup Organization, whether one agrees or disagrees with this statement correlates strongly with the likelihood to be engaged in one's work and the quality of life in general (Rath, 2007, p. ii). While this may seem intuitively obvious, as many as seven out of 10 people do not have this opportunity at work (p. 11). Why not? Part of the problem lies in individuals not knowing what s/he is good at doing. The focus of Tom Rath's *StrengthsFinder 2.0* is identifying each person's natural talents through description as well as an online self-assessment.

The *StrengthsFinder 2.0* text is divided into an introduction and two parts. The introduction and Part I discuss the premise behind the research at the Gallup Organization that inspired the development of the online assessment. In short, many learning programs have been and continue to be focused on people's shortcomings. Rath, instead, suggests focusing on strengths; people should build on things for which they have natural aptitude instead of working doggedly to compensate for their weaknesses. This idea extends to management methods also; Rath reports that employees are much less likely to be actively disengaged at work if their manager focuses on their strengths rather than their weaknesses (just 1% vs. 22%; p. iv). Rath contends that society tends to cling to a "misguided maxim" that "you can be anything you want to be, if you just try hard enough" (Rath, 2007, p.5). Rath uses several well-articulated examples to illustrate the inefficiency of spending time and effort nurturing skills for which one has little or no natural talent rather than on things that quickly expand one's ability to perform. He asserts that an individual's strength at a particular task or activity is the product of his or her talent or natural aptitude for a task and the investment placed into developing it. Thus, raw talent has a multiplier effect with practice, and the inherent ability is as important as the effort we put into training.

Each copy of *StrengthsFinder 2.0* comes with an access code for an online personality test that bears the same name. In fact, this book is essentially an introduction to the *StrengthsFinder 2.0* online assessment and a guide to interpreting the results. For those who may be seeking a much more comprehensive discussion on the research that led to the development and theories behind the *StrengthsFinder* assessments (including its personality

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studies that support those theories), the 2001 publication, *Now, Discover Your Strengths*, by Marcus Buckingham and Donald O. Clifton, may be more gratifying. This earlier publication accompanied the original version (1.0) of the *StrengthsFinder* online assessment.

Regardless, the *StrengthsFinder 2.0* online test is relatively quick and easy to take, requiring between 30-45 minutes of uninterrupted time to ensure the test taker does not "over-think" the answers. The results provide the test taker with five natural themes from a set of 34 "Themes of Talent" that have been developed as a common language or classification system for things people are good at doing. One downfall is that each book contains only one code— which can only be used by one person. That means the book is limited in its overall capacity to connect with readers. As a result, anyone interested in purchasing the book should be aware that purchasing a used copy (or one in which the scratch-off foil covering the code is missing) would provide diminished capacity for the reader.

Part II of the book provides a description of each of the 34 themes, examples and quotations from people who excel at each theme, ideas for action to help develop and work with the theme, and suggestions for working with other people for whom that theme is a strength. Each theme is a trait that is based on an inherent talent rather than a specific skill that could be acquired. The themes can manifest themselves very differently depending on the other themes a person has and other aspects of individual personality. The list of 34 is not meant to be an exhaustive list of all traits, but rather a manageable list of common traits.

According to Rath, working to develop these natural talents—or themes— will bring the opportunity for far more achievement and satisfaction in the long run than focusing on one's weaknesses or on things for which that an individual may not have a high natural aptitude. Matching students' interests and natural aptitudes with appropriate majors and career fields is a clear objective for advisors, counselors, and a variety of other university staff. Learning assistance center staff are often witness to the frustration and sense of hopelessness that arise time and again when students are not well matched. Together, the *StrengthsFinder 2.0* book and its counterpart online assessment provide an articulate argument to match tasks with natural talent. The resulting unique set of five "themes" describing the strengths the reader has, and a guide to understanding and utilizing those strengths combined, are not only useful for students as they mature through the college experience and choose careers but also to those who are interested in learning more about themselves and improving their current career. It could be used for groups of people who collaborate in addition to individuals.

With so much focus on strengths, a natural reaction is to think that Rath advocates ignoring shortcomings entirely. While he advises avoiding tasks based on one's shortcomings, he acknowledges that people will always have to do some things they are not good at and offers some advice for those areas of "lesser talent." He recommends establishing systems to help manage those tasks; for instance, someone who struggles with time management could begin a more regimented use of a PDA. Another suggestion is to partner with another person who has more talent in that specific area.

While the results may not be surprising, the descriptions in the second part of the text provide some useful insights for follow through. The suggestions are quite effective. For example, one of the traits within the "Positivity" theme is being easily drained by cynics. The book recommends avoiding negative people, but also provides tools a reader can use to deal with people who are being negative when it is not practical to simply avoid them. This could be as simple as redirecting the person being negative to a different topic of conversation. The resolution could also draw upon other themes the reader possesses. For instance, someone who may have the "empathy" theme is likely to be able to understand the cause of the complaint and show compassion for the complainer, which creates an opportunity for both parties to work together on a solution rather than be entangled in a confrontation neither intended.

The benefit to the community (work place or university) increases as more people are aware of the themes and suggestions outlined in the book. For instance, others who have taken the personality assessment could offer an interpretive perspective that may not be considered otherwise. Others' views are not only more objective; they identify what Rath refers to as "blind spots": cases and situations where one's themes lead to unforeseen or neglected negative consequences. For instance, people with the "command" theme are characterized as being candid, action-driven, and quick to take charge. Once a course of action is clear to someone with this theme, s/he can grow impatient when other people are reluctant to adopt their plan and sometimes turn potential partners away by being too aggressive. One recommendation is to partner with people who display "WOO" (Winning Others Over) or "empathy" themes because that combination will naturally recruit support and avoid unintended confrontations.

The assessment results have also spawned a number of interesting discussions on how one person's themes interplay with those of others. These conversations have also provided context for broaching subjects that might otherwise have been difficult to bring up. For example, when I discussed the "positivity" theme with a colleague, he admitted that he can get caught up in negative cycles of thought without realizing it; he asked me, in turn, to let him know when it was happening. This exchange was beneficial because I not only have his permission to call him out when he's being negative, but we both see it as a favor to him rather than as a confrontation.

The kind of discussion this book generates facilitates the development of better working relationships through mutual understanding. Any group of people who work together, including the staff of a learning assistance center, can benefit from *StrengthsFinder 2.0*. This could be as simple as each member taking the assessment and getting together to discuss it, or it could be integrated into a workshop. People who work together can create synergistic partnerships with others who have complementary strengths. In addition, team members know who has the potential to help when one of their shortcomings is activated. When it comes to task allocation, matching tasks to people with appropriate themes makes everyone's job easier and more enjoyable. Better understanding of each other's talents will help answer questions like the following: Who should edit the budget? Who is the best choice for a recruitment committee? Who will organize the award ceremony to make it as smooth and inclusive as possible? Who is best prepared to facilitate conflict resolution between departments?

StrengthsFinder 2.0 is also useful for learning assistance centers as an assessment tool for students. This assessment does not provide direct information about learning styles and strengths like other more famous self-assessment instruments; instead, it offers a broader understanding of personalities similar to that provided by the well established system by Myers Briggs. In fact, the test format itself is very similar to the Myers Briggs although *StrengthsFinder* provides one question at a time for only a short time period, which makes for a smoother testing experience. Whereas the Myers Briggs results are limited to 16 categories, *StrengthsFinder* offers more than 30 million possible combinations of themes. The results of StrengthsFinder are more dynamic in that each theme is expressed differently depending on what other themes are present in an individual. Each individual who takes the assessment is likely to have his or her own unique combination of themes in addition to having some themes in common with other people. Discovering how one's themes interrelate and how each manifests itself is an ongoing and uniquely individual process.

The themes themselves are very tangible and easy to grasp, especially with the quotes from people who have each theme provided in the text. The book and online assessment empower students to direct their own course of study and choice of career to take advantage of their strengths and to seek collaboration with people whose themes complement their own. The *StrengthsFinder* system also raises awareness of limitations and the advantage of partnership with people who can help us compensate for our shortcomings.

One clear drawback to the *StrengthsFinder 2.0* book is that the code that comes in each copy can only be used for one person to take the online assessment once. This has the potential to limit the utility of the system for a learning assistance center interested in administering the assessment to large numbers of students. Nonetheless, the cost of each book is relatively modest and possibly comparable to the cost of administering the Myers Briggs. While it is important for the reader to be aware that one copy of the book cannot be fully utilized by more than one individual, this does not necessarily preclude application to groups. Readers interested in using the assessment for workshops or student assessment are encouraged to contact the Gallup Organization.

This book and the accompanying test are not only great tools for people interested in learning more about themselves but also a useful language for discussions between people who collaborate on a regular basis. The test results give practical insights into one's own character, tips for using one's talents to best advantage, and pitfalls to avoid; it also offers insight into other people and guidance for improving collaborative work.
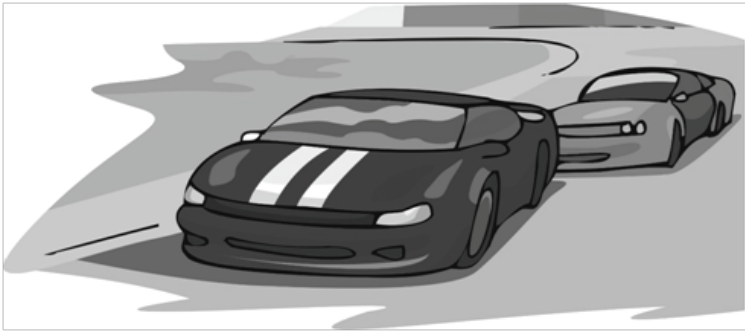
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