

Teaching Students to Write across a Border: A Writing Curriculum for Inner-City College Access Programs

Jennifer Kwon Dobbs

Abstract

This article explores the development of the Summer Tools, Information, Motivation, and Education (SummerTIME) Writing Program, the only program of its kind in Los Angeles that conducts self-assessment. The author describes the geographical and political boundaries separating inner-city Los Angeles high school graduates from higher education, contextualizes the pedagogy that informed the founding of this program's curriculum, and analyzes the program's strengths and weaknesses as a potential model for inner-city college access.

“Having made strides so tre-men . . . tremendous! in the past year she was given the mayor’s award for outstanding achievement. She seems to be actively en . . . “ (“Engaged,” Jermaine say) “in all aspects of the learning process? However, (oh oh, when white bitch start with *however!*) her TABE test scores are disappointingly low.” . . .

The time and resources it would require for this young woman to get a G.E.D. or into college would be considerable. Although she is in school now, it is not a job readiness program. Almost all instruction seems to revolve around language “a-c-” (Jermaine spelling now) “q, a-kwi-si-tion acquisition!” (“What’s that?” I ask. “You know, to get. Language acquisition, to get some language.”) “The teacher, Ms. Rain, places great emphasis on writing and reading books. Little work is done with computers or the variety of multiple choice pre-G.E.D. and G.E.D. workbooks available at low cost to JPTA programs.”— Sapphire, *Push* (1997)

Driving on East Jefferson Boulevard

My ideas about teaching writing were shaped by two places held together by geography—the honors seminar room at the University of Southern California (USC), where I instructed freshman composition while studying for a Ph.D. in Literature and Creative Writing, and the classroom at the Jefferson Community Adult School (JCAS) where I taught beginning ESL students. To get to JCAS from USC, you must drive eastbound on Jefferson Boulevard past Figueroa Avenue’s row of fast food restaurants (Popeye’s Chicken, Panda Express, El Pollo Loco, Chipotle, KFC, among others) and the statue of Felix the Cat advertising low auto loan rates to the 110 Harbor Freeway underpass, which serves as a border between University Village and inner-city Los Angeles. You must go through the intersection of Broadway Avenue and Jefferson

beyond the university parking garage where a white shuttle bus connects students to main campus. Along the way, street lights stop at tagged storefronts advertising in Spanish and English express money transfers, barber shops, UPS shipping services, swap meets, El Gallo Jiro's deli in Numero Uno's pink and sea green complex, car washes, houses with bougainvillea bushes, gated entries, windows barred yet open with fluttering drapes, Dunkin Donuts, schools in abandoned churches and in motels transformed into churches, community centers, a police station and police car wash, and used cars for sale. If you hold the speedometer steady at 35 mph, you avoid red. East Jefferson Boulevard ends at South Central Avenue, so you must continue east on to 41st Street. Alternatively, you can drive down Martin Luther King's residential block and head south on Hooper Avenue in order to pull into the Home of the Democrats' chain gated parking lot.

My four-night-a-week drive down Jefferson was toward the end of George W. Bush's first term. "No Child Left Behind" had been signed into law in 2002 (Schemo 2004). Assessment could no longer be ignored as optional, although it had been well established in California as far back as 1971 when the California State University (CSU) English Departments began administering their own English Placement Test (EPT) (White 2001). The EPT was a proactive step against the multiple-choice test designed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) and CSU system administrators. *La Opinión* had awarded Los Angeles a "D" for its education of Latinos, while *The New York Times* reported that Hispanics were the largest minority in the United States (Clemetson 2003, Pachon 2003). The Senate debated the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act for a second time, and a famous Austrian body builder turned blockbuster movie star took office as the 38th governor of The Golden State (Watanabe 2007). A fence separating the United States from Mexico had begun to figure in political conversation.

But before that 700-mile embarrassment was authorized in 2006 through the Federal Secure Fence Act, I crossed a border of my own according to schedule (Hulse and Swarns 2006). In the afternoons, I taught freshmen honors students writing in the Thematic Option Program at USC, and at nights, I instructed beginning ESL students at JCAS. Credentialed by the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), my ambition was to earn money to pay for rent, food, gas, and the occasional splurge purchase (a new pair of serviceable black shoes, a book I tired of renewing at the library). LAUSD teachers' hourly wages followed a step system, so I earned \$35 for each contact hour in the classroom, which was more than what other part-time jobs offered. As a doctoral student, I was well-read in canonical texts that line many an academic's bookshelves—Franz Fanon, Paulo Friere, Gloria Anzaldúa, Lisa Lowe, bell hooks, Adrienne Rich, Peter Elbow, Mina Shaughnessy, James Baldwin, W.E.B. Du Bois. So I had a language for cultural politics. I understood pedagogy's stakes and values related to cultural and political enfranchisement, but what I was not prepared for was the drive down Jefferson Boulevard, which in hindsight was not only a mapping of socio-economic differences, but also a crossing of cultural, emotional, and linguistic terrain. Driving at night to return home near the USC campus, I reflected: When we teach students to write, are we not also instructing them to cross borders?

What is a successful border crossing? In teaching students to write well, are there not several cultural subtexts that they also must master?

When the USC Center for Higher Education and Policy Analysis (CHEPA) invited William “Memo” Arce and me to develop a writing program for Summer Tools, Information, Motivation, and Education (SummerTIME) in 2005, I reread Sapphire’s *Push*, a novel that has among its many virtues the collision of languages at the border of college access. (Julia Colyar and Zoe Corwin established an earlier version of SummerTIME in 2002, which lacked a writing program, and instead focused on college knowledge such as financial aid information.) Precious Jones could have been one of my students at JCAS. Classes began at 5:45 p.m. and lasted until 9 p.m. Mondays–Thursdays (*Insidehighered.com* 2005, 2008; Silverstein 2005). Students oftentimes arrived straight from work still wearing uniforms or carrying their toddlers who quietly watched their parents take notes and practice English phrases. Some students arrived late because the boss required an extra hour to meet the day’s quota. Other students disappeared for weeks and then reappeared with their arms in casts. A few attended every night with their homework neatly handwritten since they used their lunch breaks to complete assignments, and still others stopped coming altogether because, as one student said to me, “I can’t, teacher. My family needs money.” Still others were not even adults but had no other means to get an education since they had been expelled from high school. At JCAS sitting next to men and women the same age as their parents, they sent text messages to their friends but did so quietly and finished their class work.

The students who completed and passed my class and who progressed all the way to the G.E.D. preparatory course, which I also taught, were very few. In fact, only 12 students enrolled compared to the 40–50 signed up for just one of four beginning ESL sections. The G.E.D. prep students had received certificates of achievement and had been encouraged by their instructors who mentored them through the ESL sequence to go all the way to college. Like Precious Jones, they had worked hard and expected to reach their dreams of higher education, but as a freshman composition instructor at one of the nation’s most elite universities reading their assignments, I felt like the border patrol whenever I marked grammatical errors. I didn’t want to teach grammar using multiple-choice G.E.D. workbooks and so replicate the correct answer key because grammar alone would not help the students to do well in first year writing. Like Ms. Rain, I wanted the students to shape their prose through writing and reading books, a skill they would need in order to succeed in freshman composition. Yet I could imagine the narrative that would overwhelm theirs. I had read it before in *Push*: “. . . her TABE scores are disappointingly low.’ . . . The time and resources it would require for this young woman to get a G.E.D. or into college would be considerable . . .” I realized that teaching students to write across borders means teaching them a variety of skills, test-taking being one of them.

CHEPA’s invitation to develop a curriculum for Los Angeles inner-city students, some whom actually attended Jefferson High School (JCAS was housed in the same facilities at night), provided an opportunity to re-enter the border again from another

angle but with similar questions. What is good writing? Why—in terms of curricula—are high-achieving seniors from inner-city Los Angeles underprepared, and what curricular features should a summer writing program have in order to support their transition to college? As founding director of the 2007 SummerTIME Writing Program, I shaped a curriculum informed by conversations in my head as I drove back and forth between JCAS and USC: What variety of skills do students need to write across the border? Are those skills specific to border crossing, or are they portable to the other side of college access?

What Is Good Writing, or How to Cross a Shifting Boundary?

It's not news to report that high school graduates are oftentimes underprepared to meet college-level expectations. In a 2006 analysis and study by Paul Attewell, David Lavin, and others, developmental or remedial education was found to be widespread, accounting for "40 percent of traditional undergraduates [who took] at least one such course" and "even more common among older nontraditional students" (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, and Levey 2006). The historical roots of the conversation about college English remediation run deep. As early as 1959, Alfred H. Grommon observed, "the problem is now intensified" to the degree that "some institutions have abolished remedial English courses and are beginning to use their English placement examinations instead as a means of selecting candidates for admission," thereby pushing the onus solely on to high schools to prepare students (Grommon 1959; Yancey 1999). Other four-year colleges in the following years moved toward expanding their remedial programs while others, more recently, have begun to phase them out "and to redirect students in need of remediation to community college" where transfer to a four-year college is not necessarily assured (Attewell et al. 2006). Regardless of the differing directions that colleges have taken, the message remains clear: students are not ready to write at the college level. This boundary between high school and college curricula is a learning gap with both sides advocating good writing, yet standards cannot be discussed without attending to college access, which is primarily at stake.

Students who place in remedial English in California, therefore, face two possible scenarios in order to become prepared for freshman composition: enroll in a community college with the goal of transferring to a four-year college or participate in an intensive summer writing program in order to learn what good college-level writing entails. Because low-income students, students of color, and students for whom English is not a primary language are overrepresented in remedial coursework, their access to college needs to be centered when discussing the decisions that students must make to prepare themselves for college English. An intensive summer writing program that's self-reflexive and supports cultural integrity is preferable as it previews college-level skills and evaluation criteria, a critical feature that—as shall be discussed later—assists students in making the transition to college English (Tierney and Jun 2001). With only 22–26 percent of students at community colleges declaring majors and

completing coursework toward bachelor's degrees, the promise of transfer to a four-year college is not guaranteed (Bragg 2001). Remedial coursework at a two-year college delays and imperils transfer or may even lead to student redirection toward a vocational focus (Bragg 2001).

Yet what is good writing, particularly with an eye toward preparing for and making the transition to college? High school teachers identify it as expository prose, not grammar, with little to no focus on creative expression—a definition that is not out of sync with college writing's attention to thesis-driven argumentation. For example, Priscilla A. Abrahamson describes teaching “hard writing” at the college-preparatory level, a kind of writing that privileges the analytical and rhetorical distance that college writing courses prefer, to the exclusion of soft writing (that is, personal narrative):

We know our students will need to do this kind of writing [hard writing in college], and so we teach it. We press our students to excise themselves and their situations from their writing (no ‘I,’ no ‘you,’ not even ‘My paper will show’). We teach them structure (notably the five-paragraph essay and ‘the codified “modes,” especially explanation and argument). We emphasize external authority in research, and we spend hours teaching the conventions of correct notation. We insist on deductive reasoning: thesis, reasons, and examples. And those of us who have come to recognize the value of process in teaching writing have slowed everything down to allow for prewriting, conferences, and revisions (Abrahamson 1993.).

However, the need to articulate high school language arts curricula with freshman composition persists as a dilemma that has given rise to the development of intensive summer writing programs, most of which are sponsored by colleges (for example, The Western Pennsylvania Writing Project, The Carleton Summer Writing Program, among others). These summer writing programs either seek to immerse students in an authentic college-writing experience or to fill holes in their education through remedial coursework “in writing and reading designed ‘to transform’ high school writers into college essayists” (Appleman and Green 1993). Sometimes these programs will partner high school and college instructors together to engage them in writing activities and dialogue about coordinating and exchanging pedagogies.

Yet what good writing means in order to bridge the gap, to cross the boundary between high school and college, is not always clear when translated into practice. As discussed by Deborah Appleman and Douglas E. Green, instructors in Carleton College's three-week Summer Writing Intensive, pedagogies that privilege good writing as a means to facilitate the transition to college may send conflicting messages about what it entails:

For example, although the Summer Writing Program does not focus on grammar and syntax, we staff members do judge student papers partly in response to their grammatical ‘correctness’ and their syntactic maturity.

Simply stated, how can we lead the Writing Program's students if we are

giving them mixed signals? (Appleman and Green 1993)

Though intending to focus on writing as a rhetorical process, the instructors instead applied an evaluation model that included grammatical errors, which they had defined as a remedial issue. Torn between the intention to immerse students in a college-level experience and the practice of correcting grammatical errors in the students' writing, the instructors recognized that the boundary between high school and college English might be more evanescent than they had previously expected.

The tentative quality of this boundary becomes even more apparent when reviewing the content and evaluation criteria of placement exams. For example, the Advanced Placement Exam, which consists of multiple-choice questions and timed essays, weighs the multiple-choice section more heavily "than the three timed essays [that] students are given two hours to complete" suggesting that the actual work of writing carries less value (Jones 2001). Similarly, the writing portion of the CSU English Placement Test, which is required for enrollment but not admission to CSU, asks students to take two 30-minute multiple-choice sections on reading and comprehension and to write a brief persuasive essay in response to a text within 45 minutes. In addition to favoring multiple-choice test taking skills to measure whether students can identify textual facts rather than create an original analysis, these exams ask students to consider writing within an inauthentic setting. (For a description of the California State University's English Placement Test, see the Educational Testing Services' website, <http://www.ets.org>.) In effect students must interpret what the test means by reading, a practice that differs from the dialogic give and take practiced in the classroom and with which they are more familiar (Kraemer 2005). Moreover writers do not utilize multiple-choice when brainstorming, drafting, and revising essays, and they generally require more than 45-minutes to finalize their work for submission to a reader.

Students, who have made the transition to college and look back on their experiences in high school language arts classes, note these mixed signals and their consequences. In a study by D. R. Ransdell and Gregory R. Glau, 250 students were surveyed about their transition from high school to college English. One question in particular, "Some students find that college English is a challenge they weren't quite prepared for. If you could give some advice to your old teachers, what would it be?" elicited responses about clarifying what writing means at the college-level, not just in terms of genre (the five-paragraph essay), but also in terms of quantity (Ransdell and Glau 1996). The foremost recommendation that students made was that high school teachers should require them to write, write, write (Ransdell and Glau 1996). Ransdell and Glau's findings corroborate the students' opinions. Students who remembered writing less—approximately 2.7 formal papers in a given year during 9th–12th grades—placed in ENG 100 (Remedial Writing) versus those who began their freshman fall semester in ENG 101 and who recalled writing on average 3.4 papers per year (Ransdell and Glau 1996). Students also voiced concern about the kind of writing that they were asked to prepare in high school noting that the five-paragraph essay, a structure that they sought to master and were rewarded for doing so in high school, did not suffice in college. Authentic college-level assignments would've helped the students to preview and to

become acquainted with the kind of writing that colleges expect.

However, what's feasible in theory is not necessarily so in practice. High school instructors simply lack the time to read and evaluate a heftier load of student writing. With pressures on high school instructors to teach to exams that evaluate writing in inauthentic settings (for example, multiple-choice exams that require students to identify mechanical errors), manage swelling classroom size, and to emphasize testing standards in lieu of crafting essays, the instructors face overwhelming challenges to implement tasks more similar to college-level work and to assign more writing.

In urban settings where these pressures are heightened and issues of access are compounded for low-income, minority students, summer writing programs appear even more necessary to intervene and to bridge the gap between high school and college English curricula. Research has shown that educational gains made during the summer are absolutely essential to a student's academic performance in the following academic year. While it may be unlikely that 3–6 weeks of summer instruction prior to freshman year in college may help students to fill in all of their educational holes, it is realistic to suggest that an intensive program may ease the transition to college by preparing them for college-level expectations. As the students in Ransdell and Glau's study recommended, "the transition between high school and college writing could be improved by previewing college writing (Ransdell and Glau 1996)." Such a preview means a focus on immersion, not remediation, so that students are familiar with how colleges define and evaluate good writing. A summer writing program can and should do just that.

The SummerTIME Writing Program — An Immersion-Based Model

Interfaced alongside writing program curricula at top-tier universities, yet organically developed in response to our students, the 2007 SummerTIME Writing Program provides low-income students from inner-city Los Angeles with a college-level writing experience to help them make a successful transition to college. It is the only program of its kind in Los Angeles serving inner-city students and their writing needs, and the only program that evaluates its impact on students' educational goals.

The 2007 SummerTIME Writing program is organized to meet two objectives—advanced instruction in college writing to college-bound seniors and information about effective transitions to college—with self-evaluation occurring throughout the process of student recruitment, academic performance before and after the program, program implementation, and impact on the community (Oesterreich 2000). Reporting to CHEPA's director, the directors of outreach programs, curriculum, and assessment work together to administer SummerTIME's writing program and college transition components. The writing program itself features a writing center and a faculty of instructors (all who teach freshman composition and have at least a master's degree in English or a related field) who collaborate with college knowledge and individual

student advising (ISA), realizing that college-level writing skills and information about making the transition to college are intertwined.

SummerTIME students come from Los Angeles inner-city high schools and are college-bound seniors or college-going juniors. Over the past three years since the writing program's inception, SummerTIME has experienced exponential growth:

Table 1. SummerTIME Writing Program Expansion 2005–2007

Year	Seniors	Juniors	Instructors
2005	30	0	2
2006	60	0	4
2007	120	30	12

The majority of our students has high grade point averages and has taken or will take AP English courses. In 2007, the senior cohort had an average GPA of 3.54 (4.56 was the highest GPA) and represented 23 LAUSD high schools. The pilot junior cohort's average GPA was 3.66 (4.31 was the highest GPA) and represented 12 LAUSD high schools. Yet despite these academic credentials, our students placed in remedial English courses. The gap between high school language arts and college writing, as discussed earlier, lies in curriculum, and the effects are devastating to students who have mastered high school English only to be penalized once they apply their knowledge to college English placement exams, which are critical to college access.

Curriculum must therefore address the question, "How might an intensive summer writing program develop student writing skills for college?" During my tenure as curriculum director, I answered this question by focusing on immersion rather than remediation by providing students with a writing experience that closely resembled college writing, while at the same time previewing skills that they would need to acquire in advance such as Blackboard literacy and learning how to use a writing center. Immersion and remediation need not be opposed to one another. Rather, I framed writing as an intellectual pursuit so that students would look forward to what writing would make possible in their lives, instead of looking backward at high school curricula's holes.

This decision came from studying college-writing rubrics that define writing as an argumentative essay and that value thesis development and cogency and comparing them with the LAUSD curriculum, which focuses on the five-paragraph essay written in a timed test setting. This is not to say that high school writing does not value cogency, but rather to clarify how students are asked to meet a new set of expectations of and definitions for effective writing. Where college-level writing might reward students for subtle prose that explores an issue from multiple perspectives, a timed five-paragraph high school essay might require a student to state a position immediately and follow a format that allows little room for counterargument.

Given this difference in audience (and, therefore, assessment) values, students oftentimes struggle in their freshman writing courses with authorship. They seek a format to which they might adhere to earn an A rather than deciding for themselves whether they have sufficiently and thoroughly explored their selected essay topics. It was, therefore, critical for SummerTIME students to understand that college-level writing entails a shift in their attitudes toward themselves as writers and toward their writing. Instead of a student passively re-enacting a format (five paragraphs), she might actively think through her writing as process by returning to previous drafts and revising them for a variety of issues beyond grammar and clarity. To emphasize this process of owning one's writing, of becoming invested in one's voice, SummerTIME adopted a curriculum theme—Los Angeles Urban Youth: Visions and Voices of Change. This theme centered student narratives and experiences as the program's primary text; provided a shared goal for faculty, staff, and students; and set an empowering tone for the program.

To implement this vision, I formed a hiring committee and announced faculty openings for eight summer instructors, seeking to keep the instructor-student ratio low at 1:15. In addition, SummerTIME hired four writing consultants, each of which would be attached to a pair of writing instructors, who would collaborate together to design the lessons for the morning seminar. These seminars would provide the content for the essays developed during the smaller, afternoon writing sections taught by individual instructors. For instructional support, I coordinated and led a teacher and tutor orientation, collaborated with CHEPA staff and administration to write a curriculum handbook distributed to all of the faculty, and provided weekly staff meetings to address faculty's needs. Because of the intensity of SummerTIME—four weeks during July with Fridays for out-of-classroom events and weekends off—consistent pedagogical support was necessary, particularly in terms of helping to facilitate a conversation about best practices. Finding ways to support collaboration was critical to ensure that instructors and consultants were able to co-author curriculum and to be shareholders in the vision that we were all working toward.

As a result of focusing on immersion, several pilots were introduced in 2007 to promote an intellectual community among students, faculty, and staff. The SummerTIME Book, Reyna Grande's *Across a Hundred Mountains*, was one of these pilots (Grande 2006). A Los Angeleno, Grande followed her parents to the United States from Guerrero, Mexico, in 1975 and graduated from the University of California, Santa Cruz. Her novel about crossing borders provided a shared text and experience among all of the writing sections similar to Loyola Marymount University's Freshman Book Program. Students wrote their first essays (due on the first day of SummerTIME) in response to this text and attended an author reading, which for many students was their first experience of hearing an author read her/his work, during opening session. Students also received flash drives and developed their media literacy by emailing their assignments to instructors (when appropriate) and using Blackboard.

The curriculum template that I developed with the assistance of the curriculum committee, senior-level instructors who had worked with the program during the previous year, included four main assignments: preassignment due on the first day of the program, first essay (a literary analysis of the SummerTIME Book), second essay (a research-based analysis), and a portfolio that includes revisions of the two previous essays. Faculty selected additional readings for students and taught research methods using online databases to prepare them to write the second essay. Additional ancillary writing in the classroom supported these four assignments, which enabled students to preview two kinds of writing activities—literary analysis and social issues-based research. Emphasizing student self-evaluation (after all, students are their first readers and critics), the portfolio allowed students to review their work and reflect on their individual challenges and strengths.

Another key pilot included the Writing Center, a resource that emerged from my understanding of college writing as a complex set of practices not limited to the classroom. The Writing Center sought to provide students with opportunities to develop out-of-class agency when faced with the challenges of drafting their essays. The writing center staff was hired from among experienced consultants who had worked previously at the University of Southern California's Writing Center. They were asked to write support sheets that gave additional tips and exercises for writing issues that might arise during a student's appointment. In addition, they led an info session with handouts that advised students during the opening day of SummerTIME about what a writing center is and how to use it effectively. Students became familiar with the writing center's resources, how to interact with a consultant, and how to follow up on previous appointments in order to continue to address and overcome writing difficulties. Each student was assigned at least three appointments with a consultant attached to his/her writing seminar.

I also collaborated with CHEPA staff to build an intellectual culture that would enable crossroads between student writing in the classroom and student out-of-class experiences. The goals of this culture were to foster community among the students and to promote a supportive, college-going environment with high expectations. Research has shown that developing a college-going culture supportive of cultural integrity is critical to retention (Tierney 1999). The SummerTIME Writing Program, therefore, sponsored an essay contest and student research panel with a discussant, USC Professor Gil Conches, and hosted a film screening with guest speakers who spoke about their journeys as inner-city youth who reached positions of academic and community leadership. Students also attended a field trip at the Japanese American Museum and participated in an interactive, technology-based experience, designed by the instructors and consultants, at the Center for the Preservation of Democracy.

As a result of this culture, students took the initiative to create a slideshow made out of pictures that they had taken during the program and featured the slideshow during the closing session. The slideshow narrated their growing sense of empowerment, their shared view of themselves as future leaders. But, of course, this raises the question,

“Where are the students now?” Did they successfully make the transition to college? What happened to their writing? The SummerTIME Writing Program answers these questions using three assessment instruments: (1) Test of Written Language, Third Edition (TOWL-3) pre- and post-tests; (2) junior and senior-level rubrics (interfaced with college writing program rubrics at top tier 4-year colleges) created by curriculum to evaluate grades; and (3) ETS’s Student Instructional Report (SIR II) to learn about student views of the program’s effectiveness. As an added incentive to students and to support ongoing evaluation efforts, the senior cohort was promised one thousand dollar scholarships for missing no more than two days from the program and earning a B or better in their writing seminars. The scholarships were disbursed in two amounts, one at the end of the program and another at the beginning of the spring semester. Students were required to report their academic performances in freshman composition to receive the second installment of the scholarship.

According to the TOWL-3, both junior and senior students wrote 1.5 grades higher compared to their pretest writing grade levels. 90 percent of SummerTIME seniors also earned scholarships and secured financial aid. During their first semester of college, two-thirds of SummerTIME participants responded to a survey asking questions regarding academics and student involvement. One question included whether SummerTIME prepared the students for college-level writing. Seventy-six percent felt that the program either adequately prepared them or prepared them extremely well for college-level writing. Twenty-four percent felt that the program helped them somewhat with college-level writing. After reviewing their fall transcripts, it was apparent that many students struggled academically during their first semester/quarter, especially in their English/writing courses. Ninety percent of the students were high-achieving high school students with a GPA of at least 3.5. The average overall high school GPA for the SummerTIME students was much higher than their average college GPA. The average college GPA was 2.8 for these students. At least five students received below 2.0, placing them on academic probation. The average English/writing composition course grade was a C+/C for those students who completed it during the fall, which was a little over 60 percent. Many students who were enrolled at CSU institutions were also enrolled in remedial English/writing courses.

Conclusion: The SummerTIME Writing Program’s Challenges

To become a stronger potential model for college access, the SummerTIME Writing Program should “catch them before they fall” by building up its junior cohort, because college-bound seniors who place in remedial English are already struggling by the time they take an intensive summer writing program. By identifying and meeting the students’ writing challenges earlier, SummerTIME’s curriculum would enable students to apply what they’ve learned and previewed in advance of writing placement exams. In addition, streamlining the program—doing more with less—would make the program hinge less on site-specific resources (for example, USC and CHEPA’s facilities and catering) and more portable for agencies interested in developing SummerTIME writing programs of their own.

In addition, more classroom time does not always translate into better academic performance. On average each week, SummerTIME writing instructors prep sixteen contact hours in addition to grading fifteen revised student essays (not taking into account evaluating ancillary assignments) and holding three weekly office hours. Avoiding faculty burnout is key for retaining effective instructors and consultants as well as attracting new ones. Moreover, strengthening collaboration between faculty and administration to avoid a top-down, micro-managed culture would continue to make possible pedagogical innovation such as the writing center pilot's content, which emerged as a result of the consultants' expert authorship of materials. In this way, faculty will be more likely to return to the program because it benefits their teaching and includes them as part of the dialogue. Lastly, it's important to find ways to develop this dialogue as a self-reflexive, shared narrative toward refining SummerTIME in an organic, responsive manner based on its previous successes and challenges. Seeking to support student voices of authority and to bolster college access, CHEPA shall continue to explore these matters toward developing an effective summer programmatic model focused on writing with the overall goals of equality and social justice.

I am grateful to Victor Garcia and Drs. Susan Naomi Bernstein, William G. Tierney, Kristan Venegas, and Stefan Liess for commenting on earlier versions of this essay.

References

Abrahmson, Priscilla A. 1993. "Between a Rock and a Soft Spot: Re-Viewing College Preparatory Writing." *The English Journal* 82 (6, October): 14.

Appleman, Deborah and Douglas E. Green. 1993. "Mapping the Elusive Boundary between High School and College Writing." *College Composition and Communication* 44 (2, May): 192.

Attewell, Paul, David Lavin, Thurston Domina, and Tania Levey. 2006. "New Evidence on College Remediation." *The Journal of High Education* 77 (5, September-October): 898-899.

Bragg, Debra D. 2001. "Community College Access, Mission, and Outcomes: Considering Intriguing Intersections and Challenges." *Access and Equity in Post-secondary Education*, special issue of *Peabody Journal of Education* 76 (1): 101-102.

Clemetson, Lynette. 2003. "Hispanics Now Largest Minority, Census Shows." *New York Times*, 22 January.

Grande, Reyna. 2006. *Across a Hundred Mountains*. New York: Washington Square Press.

Grommon, Alfred H. 1959. "Coordinating Composition in High School and College." *The English Journal* 48 (3, March): 123-124.

Hulse, Carl, and Rachel L. Swarns. 2006. "Senate Passes Bill on Building Border Fence." *New York Times*, 30 September.

Insidehighered.com. 2005, 2008. "Crash Course," *insidehighered.com*, 22 August 2005, 10 Dec. 2008. Accessed at <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2005/08/02/usc>.

Jones, Joseph. 2001. "Recomposing the English AP Exam." *The English Journal* 91 (1, September): 53.

Kraemer, Don J. 2005. "Fighting Forward: Why Studying Standardized Tests with Our Students Is Important." *The English Journal* 94 (4, March): 90.

Oesterreich, Heather. 2000. *Characteristics of Effective Urban College Preparation Programs*. New York, NY: ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education. Eric Document No. ED 448 244.

Pachon, Harry 2003. "Education of Latinos in Los Angeles Earns a 'D.'" *La Opinión* 23 November.

Ransdell, D. R., and Gregory R. Glau. 1996. "Articulation and Student Voices: Eliminating the Perception That 'High School English Doesn't Teach You Nothing.'" Right Writing, special issue of *The English Journal* 85 (1, January): 19–21.

Sapphire. 1997. *Push*. New York: Vintage.

Schemo, Diana Jean. 2007. "Bush Proposes Broadening the No Child Left Behind Act." *New York Times*, 25 January.

Silverstein, Stuart. 2005. "Boost for the College-Bound." *Los Angeles Times*, 29 July, B1, print edition.

Tierney, William G. 1999. "Models of Minority College-Going and Retention: Cultural Integrity versus Cultural Suicide." *Preparing Students for the New Millennium: Exploring Factors That Contribute to the Successful Education of African American Students*, special issue of *The Journal of Negro Education* 68 (1, Winter): 80–91.

Tierney, William G. and Alexander Jun. 2001. "A University Helps Prepare Low Income Youths for College: Tracking School Success." *The Social Role of Higher Education*, special issue of *The Journal of Higher Education* 72 (2, March–April): 205–225.

Watanabe, Teresa 2007. "Dreams Put on Hold for Many Illegal Immigrant Students." *Los Angeles Times*, 26 October.

White, Edward M. 2001. "The Opening of the Modern Era of Writing Assessment: A Narrative." *College English* 63 (3, January): 309.

Yancey, Kathleen Blake. 1999. "Looking Back as We Look Forward: Historicizing Writing Assessment." *A Usable Past: CCC at 50: Part 1*, special issue of *College Composition and Communication* 50 (3, February): 483–503.

Author Information

Jennifer Kwon Dobbs, Assistant Professor of English, is interested in poetry, poetics, creative nonfiction, Asian American studies, adoption studies, opera, and translation. Prior to joining St. Olaf College in 2008, she taught at the City University of New York and Loyola Marymount College and also served as founding director of the SummerTIME Writing Program in Los Angeles, a college access program for inner-city high school students.

Jennifer Kwon Dobbs
Assistant Professor of English
St. Olaf College
Rolvaag Library, 503
1520 St. Olaf Avenue
Northfield, MN, 55057
Email: dobbs@stolaf.edu
Telephone: 507-786-3264
Fax: 507-786-3200