

Stretch Award

On March 27, 2003, Arizona State University's *Stretch Program* was awarded the ASU *President's Award for Innovation*! The President's Award for Innovation recognizes ASU individual employees or teams for innovations that improve the educational, administrative, or other organizational processes through creative approaches. ASU President Michael Crow presented the Award for Innovation to those who had helped administer and support *Stretch*, since it started in 1994.



- (top row) Duane Roen, Dan Bivona, Michael Crow, Karen Dwyer (current *Stretch Program* Director), Greg Glau
- (bottom row) Keith Miller, Elizabeth Horan (Chair, Department of English), Maureen Daly Goggin, Dave Schwalm

- (not pictured) Nancy Gutierrez, John Ramage
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Following is the original nomination information:

Nomination for the President's Award for Innovation: The Department of English's *Stretch Program*

The Problem

During the years leading up to 1987, ASU's Department of English had a major problem: too many students were failing the required ENG 101 and 102 courses (which sometimes were identified as "killer courses").

No one seemed to know how to help more students succeed, so many students failed and left the university. This failure/retention problem was especially acute for those writers labeled as "basic writers"—students who had little academic writing experience in high school, who enrolled with low test scores and academic deficiencies, or who otherwise were seen as "at risk" in their university studies.

The university tried a number of approaches to try to help these students, finally in 1987 asking a local community college to teach ENG 071, a "remedial" basic writing class, on the ASU campus. Based on placement information from the Provost's Office, about 20 percent of first-year students were placed into ENG 071. The hope was that such a class would better prepare ASU students for the academic writing they would be asked to do for their ENG 101 and 102 classes.

The results were dismal:

- ASU controlled neither the curriculum nor hired the instructors
- class size sometimes jumped to 35 or more students

- the course was labeled “remedial,” and students received no college credit for it
- the pedagogy focused on grammar drills and workbook exercises, rather than actual writing

The percentage of students passing ENG 071 leveled-off at only 66 percent. Worse, not all of those who managed to pass ENG 071 continued on to ENG 101, and many of those who did enroll in ENG 101 did not pass that class . . . and often left the university.

In the end, of every 1,000 new students who took ENG 071, less than half (46 percent) managed to successfully complete ENG 101, and of those 460 students who did pass, only 280 remained at ASU to register for ENG 102—a “loss rate” of almost 75 percent.

An Original, Unique Solution

In the 1991-92 academic year, Director of Composition David Schwalm and future Director of Composition John Ramage designed and then piloted two versions of what they called the *Stretch Program*, ultimately deciding – based on that pilot project – that what ASU’s basic writing students needed was more time and more experience at constructing full-length, college-level writing assignments. The *Stretch Program* was subsequently proposed and approved by the university and the Department of English. While many universities still had (and still have) community colleges teaching their basic writing students, the *Stretch* model was unique to ASU. The first class of the *Stretch* sequence was called WAC 101 (“Writing Across the Curriculum”) to reflect John Ramage’s involvement as director of ASU’s Writing Across the Curriculum program, and students received ASU elective credit for passing the class. Students who passed WAC 101 then enrolled in ENG 101 the following semester, usually with the same teacher and same group of students. The *Stretch* pilot (and other studies)

demonstrate that students who remain with a cadre of the same classmates are retained at a higher rate; they also bond more effectively with the teacher, from the two semesters of working together.

In the fall of 1994, the full *Stretch Program* was implemented, with 510 registered students. Lecturer (and now Director of Writing Programs) Greg Glau was assigned to coordinate the program. Classes were capped at 22 students, so students could receive more individual attention.

In the fall of 1997, an ESL (English as a Second Language) component was added, for international students (who then take a WAC 107 – ENG 107 sequence of classes).

A note about the student population of *Stretch*: at ASU, students are placed into a writing class based on their standardized test scores. Students who come from high schools that are underfunded (which is often the case in Arizona) tend to test more poorly than those who come from more affluent and modern high schools. Students from groups traditionally under-represented at the university (Asian Americans, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans) also often come to ASU with the lower test scores – so more of them are placed into *Stretch*. In numbers, about 23 percent of ASU's student population comes from the under-represented groups; in *Stretch*, nearly 40 percent come from those groups. Put another way, in an average ASU class, one in five students comes from an under-represented group; in *Stretch* classes, two in every five students come from one of those groups.

In effect, then, *Stretch* classes have the students with the lowest test scores, who more often come from groups seen as “at risk” in the university – the same group of students

formerly placed into – and who often failed – ENG 071.

The Results and Benefits to Students and to ASU

The data — both narrative student reports and statistical analysis — tell us that the *Stretch Program* has made a significant difference to ASU and to ASU students.

What Our Students Say

Each semester, *Stretch* students are asked to complete an anonymous evaluation of the program. 89 percent of those completing these anonymous surveys tell us they think their "writing has improved" because of the program. Students note that especially they feel more confident about their writing, they can expand and provide more detail, that their organization has improved, and even that they see an improvement in grammar and mechanics.

As we might expect, most of these students say the program is effective because of the extra time they receive to work on their writing (fully 40 percent of those students completing the survey cite the extra time to be the "best thing" about the program).

Students also point to having the same teacher and same classmates for two semesters as positive aspects of the program.

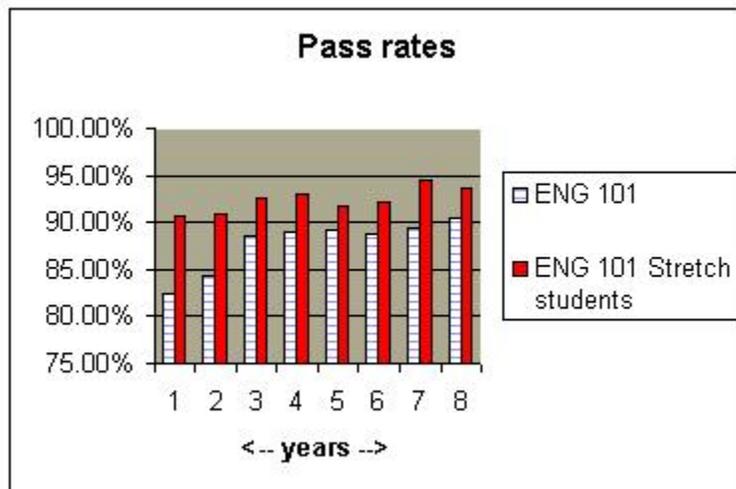
Statistical Results

The statistical results of *Stretch* have been no less than astonishing: when we compare the *Stretch* sequence with the former ENG 071—ENG 101 sequence:

| # of students | # passing | percent |
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| ENG 071, the last five years we offered it: | 2581 | 1709 | 66.21 % |
| WAC 101, (fall 1994-spring 2002) | 6343 | 5565 | 87.74 % |

ASU writing students now enjoy greater success than they did under the previous model, passing WAC 101 at about a twenty-percent higher rate than they passed ENG 071. It's clear that *Stretch* students benefit from the extra semester of writing experience, as they also pass ENG 101 at a higher rate than their “regular” ENG 101 counterparts – and this has been true for each year ASU has offered *Stretch*:



For each of the past eight academic years, *Stretch Program* students – those seen as most “at risk” at the university — pass ENG 101 at a higher rate than those who take “regular” ENG 101.

In addition, almost twice as many students are retained under the Stretch Program model:

- Under the old model (before *Stretch*), out of each 1,000 new students who took ENG 071, only 280 remained at ASU to register for ENG 102
- Under the new model (*Stretch*), out of each 1,000 students who take WAC 101, 460 are at ASU to register for ENG 102

And more *Stretch* students pass ENG 102 than “regular” students. While we might expect (since they have the same teacher for two semesters) *Stretch* students pass ENG 101 at a higher rate than “regular” ENG 101 students, they also pass ENG 102 at a higher rate:

- Average pass rate, all ENG 102 students, academic years 1993-94 through 2001-02 (excluding summer sessions) **85.39%**
- Average pass rate, for ENG 102 *Stretch* students, academic years 1994-95 through 2001-02 (excluding summer sessions)..... **88.32 %**

Stretch ENG 101 students pass ENG 102 at about a three percent higher rate than do “regular” ENG 101 students.

Publicizing *Stretch*

For the six years he directed the *Stretch Program*, Greg Glau worked to publicize it – starting with a 1996 article in *WPA: Writing Program Administration*. This article and Glau’s conference presentations engendered a number of requests for further information; Glau also focused on and publicized *Stretch* in a variety of venues. Glau

- Presented "Bringing them home: Three perspectives on the *Stretch Program* — a new model of university- level basic writing instruction” at ASU’s Composition Conference and also at the national Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC); this presentation was later published as an ERIC document
- Chaired the session and Presented "Reconnecting Basic Writers to a University Curriculum: The Goals, Successes, and Problems of ASU's *Stretch Program*.”
1996 Southwest Regional Conference, National Council of Teachers of English

- Outlined the program and its results in a 1997 memo to the Department of English, and to President Coor and the ASU administration
- Presented "Mainstream Plus: Basic Writing Programs that Work." 1998 CCCC Convention and later published as an ERIC document
- Was elected Co-Chair, Conference on Basic Writing, and *Co-Edited, Basic Writing E-Journal* – an electronic peer-reviewed journal (with Linda Adler-Kassner), 1999-2002
- Designed and maintained the Conference on Basic Writing archives, housed on ASU Web space
- Presented "Hard Work and Hard data: Getting Our Message Out." 1999 CCCC Convention and published as an ERIC document
- Designed and created Web module, "Assessment and 'Hard Data:' Improving the Public and Administrative Perception of Your Basic Writing Program," part of the McGraw-Hill "Teaching Basic Writing program, at <http://auth.mhhe.com/socscience/english/tbw/>, 2001
- Contributed to book chapter: "Reconsidering and Assessing the Work of Writing Program Administrators." (With Duane Roen, Barry M. Maid, John Ramage, and David Schwalm). *The Writing Program Administrator as Theorist*. Eds. Shirley Rose and Irwin Weiser. Portsmouth, NH: Heineman: 2002
- Wrote book chapter: "Hard Work and Hard Data: Getting Our Message Out." *The Writing Program Administrator's Resource: A Guide to Reflective Institutional Practice*. Eds. Stuart C. Brown and Theresa Enos. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum: 2002

Others, too, both promoted and supported *Stretch*, including each Chair of the Department of English and those who've directed the program; they're listed on the roster sheet:

- Former Directors of Writing Programs David Schwalm and John Ramage designed and piloted the *Stretch Program*
- Keith Miller was Director of Writing Programs from 1993-95 and thus responsible for all aspects of curriculum and instruction (including the initial implementation of the *Stretch Program*), in the 1993-94 academic year
- Duane Roen was Director of Writing Programs and thus responsible for all aspects of curriculum and instruction, including *Stretch*, from 1995-98
- Maureen Daly Goggin was Director of Writing Programs and thus responsible for all aspects of curriculum and instruction, including *Stretch*, from 1999-2000
- The *Stretch Program* has been continually supported by Department of English Chairs: Nancy Gutierrez, Dan Bivona, and Elizabeth Horan
- Karen Dwyer took over *Stretch* in the fall of 2000, and currently directs the program. Each year she responds to a number of inquiries about the logistics of the program, works with student surveys, etc.
- Greg Glau was hired in 1994 to direct the *Stretch Program* and did so from 1994—2000, and is currently Director of Writing Programs, where he has responsibility for curriculum and instruction, including *Stretch*

A National Model

With the publicity *Stretch* has garnered, other colleges and universities are putting such a model into place. While not every school with a *Stretch Program* identically copied

ASU's paradigm, these colleges and universities all base their curriculum on the Stretch model:

- Boise State University
- The University of Washington
- Southern Illinois University Carbondale
- The Writing Program, Fort Lewis College
- Scottsdale Community College
- The Writing Program, Indiana University, Purdue University Indianapolis
- Harry S Truman College
- Whatcom Community College
- Northern Illinois University
- Fresno Pacific University
- Quinnipiac University
- University of Virginia

Summary

In summary, more than 6,000 students have enrolled in the *Stretch Program*, and many students who would have formerly failed at ASU have succeeded here:

- they pass WAC 101 at a higher rate than they passed ENG 071
- they pass ENG 101 at a higher rate when compared to “regular” ENG 101 students
- they pass ENG 102 at a higher rate than their “regular” counterparts

All this means that:

- ***Stretch students* – those seen as “at-risk” here at ASU – succeed and are retained at a higher rate than these same groups of students under the old model we had before Stretch**