SLOAT ENG 101 ACTION PLAN

2011-12 ACADEMIC YEAR

submitted by Rich Bogart

Introduction

During the 2010-11 Academic Year, the results of the SLOAT surveys showed a strong consistency in student writing ability, both in ENG 101 and in ENG 096. It was apparent in both courses that students were able to present well-formed paragraphs and essays in an acceptable fashion. They also, apparently, were gaining the ability to perform basic research and cite the results of that research in their writing. This is all to the good and essential for College studies.

What is consistently lacking, however, is the use of correct grammar and mechanics in student writing, even at the ENG 101 level. This may not be surprising in an open–access institution where over 90% of all students are required to take some level of remediation and where there is a large population of international students. Despite the understandable nature of the phenomena, it clearly does not lend itself to academic success or professional success, and must be addressed.

Research Findings from 2010-11

In a rubric given to ENG 101 instructors during the Fall 2010 semester, they were asked to randomly take five submitted student papers from each section and rate various elements of each paper. One of the elements was, “The paper demonstrates an acceptable level of mechanics and language usage.” During the first administration of the rubric, to an early paper, only 41% of the papers reviewed received a score of “Yes” on a three-point scale to this question. The rubric was repeated at the end of the semester, and, while one would have anticipated improvement, it was minimal. The percentage of "Yes" responses only increased to 45%.

Results in Spring 2011 were a little stronger but still the clear area of weakness. A rubric completed in February resulted in a 52% “Yes" response which improved to 57% in April. Clearly results under 60% still represent an area of weakness in a vital and basic set of skills. Prof. De Freece, in examining student performance in ENG 096, reported a very similar area of concern.

Further Research

During the Spring 2011 semester, I participated in a "webinar" sponsored by the *Chronicle.* The topic of the "webinar" was improving student retention. An interesting point, in my view, was the idea that instruction, which is basically a monologue where information is flowing in one direction, is better done at home, saving classroom time for interactive activities. Instruction in grammar and mechanics was offered as an example of instruction that could be more effectively done in a student’s own time and place.

Corrective Approach

With this in mind, I decided to supplement my own section of ENG 101 with Pearson Longman's on-line tool, "My Comp Lab.". The tool is directly married to the textbook that I and the adjunct instructors use for the course. A great majority of ENG 101 sections are taught by adjuncts, and so the *Little, Brown Handbook* is used in virtually every section of the course.

I have met on multiple occasions with the publishing representative and have set the course up with this supplemental resource. The books that I have ordered for my section include a subscription to the service at a reasonable rate. The rep has given me the information my students will need to sign in and participate in the program and has assured me of her continued support.

"My Comp Lab" is designed to be very versatile. There is an on-line copy of the textbook, a very comprehensive array of on-line lessons and mastery-learning exercises on every aspect that the text covers. It is my intention to use the program in a prescriptive manner to require students to work on areas of weakness that I perceive in their mechanics. I will be able to monitor their performance and learning.

Of course, it is my hope that this approach will result in improvement in my student's retention and performance regarding grammar and mechanics. If I do see success, I then plan on informing both the Division Chair and the faculty of the success of this newly adopted pedagogical method and advise them to take the same approach with their students. Prior to that, I intend on sending a memo to all faculty teaching the course, advising them of the area of concern that has been identified and asking them to devote some time to addressing the needs of their students. Hopefully, if this approach proves successful, we should see some real improvement in this important area of weakness by the end of the Spring 2012 semester.