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# Freshmen English Grade Point Average at Piedmont Virginia Community College Correlates to Success on Old Dominion University's Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency

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Freshman English Grade Point Average  
At Piedmont Virginia Community College  
Correlates to Success on  
Old Dominion University's Exit Examination of Writing  
Proficiency

A Research Paper Presented to the Faculty of the  
STEM Education and Professional Studies Department  
of Old Dominion University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Science in Occupational and Technical Studies

By Louise Schatz

August, 2010

## Signature Page

This research paper was prepared by Louise Schatz, under the direction of Dr. John M. Ritz, in OTED 636, Problems in Occupational and Technical Education. It was submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science in Occupational and Technical Studies.

Approved by: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Dr. John M. Ritz

Advisor

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Louise Schatz

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# CHAPTER I

## Introduction

In 2008, an incredible 74% of Old Dominion University's (ODU) distance learning graduates reported that they transferred after completing an associate's degree at a community college (Office of Assessment, 2008). Since distance learning students do not have access to freshman and sophomore level classes at ODU, these students must complete the required 100 and 200 level courses at another institution--including the 6 credit hours of basic English composition that are required of all ODU graduates. These required classes are most often completed at the student's local community college. Although all community college class content is reviewed and approved by ODU prior to accepting these classes for transfer credit, the University has no control over the actual quality of writing produced by students in these classes. A grade of 'C' or higher is required to receive transfer credit, but that 'C' does not always equate to basic writing competence (Meyer, 2006).

In 1980, Old Dominion University instituted the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency as an undergraduate degree requirement. This was to ensure that all graduates were able to communicate effectively in both an academic and a professional setting (Writing Center, 2010). A passing score on this exam is required of all undergraduate, degree-seeking students prior to the awarding of their degree. The Exit Examination is particularly relevant in the case of transfer students. With the exception of a small number of upper division classes, ODU

does not provide transfer students with basic English composition instruction--transfer students take those classes at another institution, and simply bring the credits with them. Yet, by granting a diploma, ODU is certifying that these students are able to communicate effectively at a certain level. Although students sometimes consider the EEWP to be a diabolical instrument designed to keep them from graduating (undergraduate student personal communications, 1993-2010), the sole purpose of the EEWP is to determine whether students completing a baccalaureate degree at Old Dominion University are competent writers (Writing Center, 2010). The researcher has noticed over seven years that many undergraduate students at distance learning site 580 view the EEWP as a major obstacle to graduation. This view is not unfounded--many of the students do not pass on their first attempt.

Students are eligible to take the EEWP once they have earned a minimum of 58 academic credits and have passed the Writing Sample Placement Test (Writing Center, 2010). Students are routinely advised to sit for the EEWP as soon as they become eligible. Some do, but others wait until they are very close to completing their undergraduate program of study before taking the test for the first time. If any of these students are asked to repeat the test, there is a two month waiting period between attempts. This two month waiting period has the potential to push back graduation dates, seriously affect the student's ability to find a job, and disrupt the student's future plans. And although part of the problem tends to be caused by the students themselves, by waiting until very close to the end of their academic career to take the exam, having to delay

graduation because the student was unable to pass the EEWP on the first attempt can be a source of frustration. Uncomfortable conversations with parents and employers, as to why the student did not graduate as expected, are also a source of conflict. Some students say they are afraid to take the test, simply because they are not confident in their ability to write well enough to pass it (undergraduate personal communication, 2009). Since students know they cannot receive a diploma without passing the EEWP, being uncertain about their writing ability can create fear of the exam, and this fear has caused students to delay taking the test as long as possible. Sometimes a student will wait until the month before they are scheduled to graduate to take the test. Should the student be asked to repeat the test, and then have to wait the required two months between attempts, his or her graduation will be delayed, and his or her stress levels will probably increase. However, if a link could be found between transfer English grades at PVCC and initial pass rates on the EEWP, this type of student stress could be mitigated. If site advisors could predict which students would probably pass on the first attempt, and which would not, students who may require additional assistance could be directed to one of the various tutoring options available. The student would know ahead of time what to expect regarding his or her EEWP results, and they would be less likely to fear the test, since it would no longer be an unknown.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of the study was to determine if transfer student's grades in 100 and 200 level English classes from Piedmont Virginia Community College

are a predictor of initial pass rates on Old Dominion University's Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency.

## **Hypothesis**

The following hypothesis will be used to guide this study:

H<sub>1</sub>: There will be higher likelihood of a student passing the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency on the first attempt if that student's overall grade point average in Piedmont Virginia Community College English classes is 3.0 or higher.

## **Background and Significance**

In spite of being told during their transfer advising sessions, students are sometimes surprised to hear that they have to pass the EEWP prior to receiving a diploma from ODU. A frequent reaction is one of resentment at having to pass 'another test,' and the student will cite his or her grades on class projects as a rationale for not having to take the test at all (undergraduate personal communication, 2010). However, with the exception of a few upper division classes, community college English classes are the only formal writing skills training that ODU transfer students receive. A student may well have received excellent grades in their transfer composition classes, albeit with ample time and credit being given for rewrites of less than stellar submissions and possibly with some extra credit added for service learning activities (Carroll, 2002). Student grades can be based on more than just their coursework--unfortunately, receiving

good grades in writing classes does not always translate into the ability to write a coherent, cohesive essay on a given topic, and seat time in class does not always equal competency.

In addition, some students seem to be unaware that they have any writing deficiencies at all and are surprised to find that they are asked to repeat the EEWP. There are Writing Center tutorial options available, but most students view the suggestion to contact the center as an insult (undergraduate personal communication, 2009-2010). If a relationship is found between community college English grades and performance on the EEWP, these students can be directed to the Writing Center with a suggestion based on fact not on a perceived insult, and could improve their chances of passing the EEWP on the first try. If a relationship is found between community college English grades and performance on the EEWP, then earlier interventions can be planned for those students who are expected to require additional assistance.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this study are as follows:

- Participants are limited to transfer students at Old Dominion University's Distance Learning Site 580 in Charlottesville, Virginia.
- Only those students receiving transfer credit for 100 and 200 level English classes were included.

- The study does not consider the amount of writing that the student has done in his or her Old Dominion University classes to be a relevant factor.
- The study looks at only the initial Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency attempt, and it does not consider any subsequent attempts.
- The study does not consider the number of attempts required to pass the Writing Sample Placement Test to be a factor.
- The study does not consider the amount of time that has passed between completing the Community College English classes and the first Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency attempt to be a relevant factor.

### **Assumptions**

The following assumptions were used in this study:

- All students received transfer credit for traditional 100 and 200 level English classes taken at an institution other than Old Dominion University. No Advanced Placement credit status was considered, although high school dual enrollment classes were included.
- Only the first Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency attempt was considered in the data--additional attempts were not considered relevant.

- All students completed the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency at Old Dominion University Site 580 at Piedmont Virginia Community College. There was no distinction made between those students completing the test by hand and those completing the test via keyboard.
- All students were enrolled in undergraduate degree-seeking programs at Old Dominion University distance learning site 580 at Piedmont Virginia Community College.
- The graders of the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency are skilled writers and are unbiased in their evaluations of student essays.

## **Procedures**

The population of the study was undergraduate transfer students at ODU's distance learning Site 580 who had taken the EEWP at least once. The scoring of the initial attempt of a student's EEWP as either Pass or Repeat was determined by checking the ODU Writing Center EEWP results website. Test results are posted according to student University ID number. Grades received in community college English classes were researched via copies of student transcripts that were presented to obtain transfer credit for classes completed at institutions other than ODU. These copies are kept in student files on site, but if for any reason the transcript copy was unavailable, then transfer grades were researched using the Banner student records screens. Data were then analyzed using the chi-square method to determine the relationship, if any, that exists.

## Definition of Terms

The following definitions should be used when reviewing this research:

**Distance Learning Site 580**--the Old Dominion University Distance Learning site that is based on the campus of Piedmont Virginia Community College in Charlottesville, Virginia.

**Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency**--a three hour proctored writing exam during which students are asked to write a 500-word essay about a topic of their choice. Topics are chosen ahead of time, and the student is presented with the actual essay question upon arrival for the exam. The essay is then graded by two ODU faculty members who are chosen from a pool of graders representing all of ODU's academic disciplines. A score of 'Pass' as opposed to 'Repeat' is needed for the student to receive credit for completing this undergraduate degree requirement. Both graders must agree on the essay's score, but if they do not, a third evaluator is consulted. At that point, the two matching votes determine the student's score (Writing Center, 2010).

**Initial attempt**--the first time in his or her academic career with ODU that the student sits for the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency.

**Old Dominion University's Writing Center**--the office on the main campus in Norfolk, Virginia, that is responsible for the administration and evaluation of the Writing Sample Placement Test and the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency, and also for delivering writing tutorial programs to Old Dominion University students.

**Passing essay**--is defined as one that should answer the question and demonstrate logical consistency, sufficiently develop supporting evidence, possess clarity in sentence structure and word choice, and show reasonable freedom from mechanical errors (Writing Center, 2010).

**Writing Sample Placement Test (WSPT)**--all incoming students are required to take the WSPT to assess the strength of their writing skills. Students with transfer credit for freshman composition are evaluated for any issues that may affect their performance on the EEWP. The writing of students without credit for freshman composition is evaluated for placement in the appropriate level English class (Writing Center, 2010).

## **Overview of Chapters**

Chapter I supplied information on ODU and the EEWP, a graduation requirement for all undergraduate degree-seeking students. Transfer students to Old Dominion University receive basic writing instruction from other colleges or universities, and they bring the credit for those classes with them to Old Dominion. The Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency was instituted as a graduation requirement at Old Dominion University to ensure that students completing a baccalaureate degree are competent writers (Writing Center, 2010). Chapter II reviewed the relevant literature regarding standards and attitudes surrounding student writing; grade inflation issues at the community college level; and the difficulties in evaluating student writing. Chapter III outlined the Methods and Procedures used in the data collection and analysis portions of the study.

Chapter IV reported the results obtained. Chapter V summarized the findings and made recommendations for further study.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Review of Literature**

This chapter will review the literature regarding standards and attitudes surrounding student writing; grade inflation issues at the community college level, and the difficulties in evaluating student writing.

#### **Standards and Attitudes About Student Writing**

Students are considered to be prepared, or unprepared, for college level writing depending largely on the opinions of the individuals or institutions making that judgment. A student who is judged to be adequately prepared for one college or university may be judged as woefully unprepared for another university (Carroll, 2002). Almost half of all new community college students are "underprepared" as measured by institutional placement assessments (Allen & Scoring, 2005). Not only do expectations of incoming students vary between institutions, but expectations can also vary at the same institution over time. This is what happened at Harvard University during the academic year of 1873-1874.

University officials noticed that as more and more students were being accepted at Harvard and were starting classes, professors began complaining to administration about the inability of college freshman to write an acceptable paragraph (Richardson, 2008). Harvard's solution was to replace their oral entrance exam with a written one, and to implement a new English writing class—taught not by a full professor, but by Adams Sherman Hill, a newspaperman without any teaching credentials at all (Richardson, 2008).

Harvard's new composition class was not a well thought out addition to the curriculum, but rather was a quick fix to a perceived crisis (Richardson, 2008).

Freshman composition classes have been described as having only two purposes—to improve freshmen skills in writing, and to give graduate students an opportunity to develop their teaching skills (Beaufort, 2007). Freshman writing classes are viewed as simply 'writing for the sake of writing,' and not as a way for students to develop the writing skills that are going to be required in more advanced, more specialized academic areas (Beaufort, 2007). At some colleges and universities, incoming freshman are offered the opportunity to take an optional writing test. If the resulting essay is judged by faculty to be 'good enough,' then the student can place out of freshman English, essentially relegating that class to remedial status (Richardson, 2008). As was the case at Harvard, the individuals who are currently teaching composition classes at PVCC do not always have the same level of credentials that professors in PVCC's other academic subjects have (PVCC, 2010). Since freshman level writing is considered to be a 'basic' skill, it is assumed that almost anyone can teach first year composition classes (Richardson, 2008). Individuals tasked with teaching writing to incoming freshman may not have strong backgrounds in writing themselves (Kilpatrick, 1993). According to Kilpatrick (1993) a significant number of teachers cannot write even five hundred words without an embarrassing error. The individuals who are evaluating student writing do not always possess good writing skills, and as was the case at Harvard, may not even be credentialed professors (PVCC, 2010). This leads to questions of whether or not the students

are actually being taught what they really need to know about academic writing (Hillocks, 2002).

### **Grade Inflation Issues**

Students expect to be graded fairly on work they turn in to a professor, and they also expect to receive a final grade for the class based on grades received on those submissions (Broad, 2003). However, there can be other factors involved in assigning student grades that can render the final grade almost meaningless as a description of the student's performance in that class.

In general, good teachers produce good results (Maninger, 2006). However, good results (as defined by good grades) can also be achieved through means other than in-class work and out-of-class assignments. Some professors make use of service learning activities or extra credit projects-- optional class activities that take place outside of regular class time, for which students may receive extra credit (Carroll, 2002). The fact that a student can raise his or her writing grade by participating in activities other than writing supports the assertion that a grade of 'C' in a writing course does not always equate to basic writing competence (Meyer, 2006.) There is evidence that an earned grade as low as a 'D' can be raised to as high as a 'B' through the use of service learning and extra credit projects (Meyer, 2006).

Some colleges and universities employ adjunct professors to teach basic classes, such as freshman composition (Committee on Community Colleges, 2006). At some colleges, an adjunct professor is required to have the same

qualifications as a full professor (Committee on Community Colleges, 2006), but at some schools an adjunct may not even be required to have any prior classroom teaching experience (PVCC website, 2010). In addition to being an unskilled instructor, a new professor can sometimes have the latitude to creatively interpret curriculum guidelines (Beaufort, 2007). This leads to new teachers creating lesson plans that do not always fall within the boundaries of what the class is intended to be teaching the students (Beaufort, 2007). The students may get good grades, but they may not be learning exactly what was intended to be learned in that particular class.

Adjunct professors have little job security--they are generally contracted for one academic year at a time, based on the needs of their employer and the quality of the adjunct's employee evaluations (Committee on Community Colleges, 2006). One of the ways adjuncts are evaluated is by collecting student evaluations at the end of each semester. An adjunct with good student evaluations is more likely to be hired for another year than an adjunct with poor student evaluations (M. Kutnak, personal communication, 2010). Professors have been known to relax their requirements in order to get those good student evaluations, and thereby increase the chance that they will be able to continue in their jobs for another academic year.

School systems are feeling pressure at having to produce excellent student numbers on state-mandated tests (Maninger, 2006). Some schools are turning more and more to the practice of 'teaching to the test.' Students are not necessarily taught everything that is considered to be important about a certain

topic, but rather are taught the concepts and facts that are most likely to be asked on the required state exam (Maninger, 2006). Concepts that could help a student produce better writing may not be taught at all, in favor of teaching the student how to do well on a specific test. The student may eventually do well on that test, but one good test score does not mean that the student knows how to write well.

### **Difficulty in Evaluating Student Writing**

Writing has never been accorded the cultural respect or the support that reading has enjoyed through the years (Yancey, 2006). According to Yancey, society has always been more interested in readers (receptors of information) than in writers (producers of information.) This could partially explain the abundance of reading level tests and their associated remedial programs, but it could also partially explain the difficulty in evaluating a writing assignment. No other skill requiring any level of expertise, such as playing a musical instrument or conversing fluently in a foreign language, is expected to be mastered in one or two classes, but this is exactly what is expected of students who are learning how to write (Carroll, 2002).

There are many factors to consider in the evaluation of student writing, and each of those factors has the potential to give an inaccurate picture of a particular student's ability to produce an acceptable written product. One cannot eliminate such variables as teacher ability and skill level (Maninger, 2006). Seasoned teachers have developed a frame of reference regarding their

students and their subject--newer teachers may not have enough experience to have developed those same skills, especially concerning consistent grading standards. Again, a writing sample is only as good as that specific grader judges it to be at that specific moment, and one professor's 'A' work can be graded by another professor as a 'C' (Meyer, 2006).

No single standard of grading writing assignments exists—each grader will bring his or her own understanding of writing to the task, and each grader will develop his or her own standard of grading (Meyer 2006). A basic internet search for 'writing grading rubrics' returns nearly 2 million related hits. On one website alone (<http://rubistar.4teachers.org/>) there are illustrations and descriptions of more than 10 different ways to grade a writing assignment. One of these sites even provides drop down menus for the user to choose descriptions of the characteristics that he or she would like to include in the grading rubric. This researcher will not explore the relative merits of various grading rubrics. Samples are being discussed simply to illustrate that there is more than one accepted method of evaluating student writing. It stands to reason that if there are truly that many ways to grade writing, then writing standards and grading methods may also vary between a high school, a community college, and a four year institution, depending on the individual professors who are doing the grading.

Students know that in order to succeed in a class, you have to give the professor what he or she wants to see on the assignments (Carroll, 2002). If the professor has outlined a standard 5-paragraph essay formula for students, then those students are likely to write according to the formula and produce many

cookie cutter 5-paragraph essays for that professor. The professor, upon receiving those assignments, grades them based on how well the authors have followed the given formula. If the student gets an 'A' in the class, the student assumes that he or she knows how to write well (Hillocks, 2002). However, this student's understanding of his or her writing ability may not be accurate. The ability to write well on various subjects involves more than just a formula for an essay—it involves an experiential component (Carroll, 2002). Basic composition classes cannot prepare students for interdisciplinary writing (Carroll, 2002). Students and professors need to understand that a paper that is considered to be a good essay in a composition class may lack the content knowledge needed to be considered a good essay in another class. Again, a good grade in the student's last English class does not mean that he or she will be able to write well in a new situation; it simply means that he or she wrote well at that particular point in time, in the opinion of that particular professor (Carroll, 2002). Broad (2003) argues that the very structure of writing assessments is a contributing factor to low performance on those same assessments. Students can sometimes have difficulty producing acceptable written documents in any class other than their composition class. Each academic discipline requires the writer to possess a certain amount of discipline-specific knowledge (Beaufort, 2007). The student cannot competently write about a subject he or she does not understand, but is sometimes evaluated on his or her ability to do just that (Beaufort, 2007).

## Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature in terms of standards in and attitudes about freshman English writing composition classes; grade inflation at the community college level; and the difficulty in assessing student writing. Freshman English classes are considered to be remedial classes rather than academic classes, and the pervasive attitude is that anyone can teach freshman writing (Beaufort, 2007.) These remedial writing classes are sometimes taught, not by academically qualified professors, but by those who are 'putting in their time' to gain teaching experience (Beaufort, 2007.) Final course grades received by students are not necessarily indicative of that students' performance on assignments, due to the use of service learning and extra credit options to raise a student's grade (Meyer, 2006).

The Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency at ODU uses a grading rubric for evaluation (Writing Center, 2010). However, there is not currently a universally accepted standard of writing evaluation (Carroll, 2002.) Each professor will have his or her own grading rubric, and although there will be similarities, there is not one method that is accepted as the best of the group. This makes it difficult to equate a student's grade in a writing class with his or her actual level of writing performance. A writing sample is only as good as a particular evaluator judges it to be, at a particular point in time (Meyer, 2006).

## **Chapter III**

### **Methods and Procedures**

This chapter will discuss the methods and procedures used in the study. The purpose of the study was to determine if a relationship exists between ODU's distance learning site 580 undergraduate students' grades in PVCC's 100 and 200 level English classes and the student's rate of initial success on the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency. The remainder of this chapter will provide additional information on the student population used for the study; define the research variables; describe the exam's design, outline the methods of data collection and statistical analysis, and provide a summary.

### **Population**

The population used in the study was made up of 125 undergraduate students attending Old Dominion University's distance learning program at site 580, based at Piedmont Virginia Community College in Charlottesville, Virginia. These students took the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency during the three year period from 2007-2010. Some of the students in the population are still attending classes at the site, some have graduated, and some are not currently enrolled in classes at all. The population included both males and females between the ages of 20 and 52; part-time and full-time students; single and married individuals; those who were employed full-time, part-time, or not employed at all.

## **Research Variables**

The student's grade point average in transfer English classes was the independent variable in this study, and the 'pass' or 'repeat' result on the initial attempt of the EEWP was the dependent variable. PVCC's English class grades are computed on a 4.0 scale; 4.0 equals an A, 1.0 equals a D. Only the initial attempt of the EEWP was considered in this study—subsequent attempts were ignored as irrelevant. The hypothesis used in the study was that higher grades on transfer English classes would equate to higher pass rates on the initial EEWP attempt. Students whose grade point average in transfer English classes was a 3.0 or above were expected to pass the EEWP at a higher rate than those students whose grade point average in transfer English classes was below a 3.0.

## **Instrument Design**

According to Old Dominion University's website (2010), the Exit Examination is used to determine whether students completing a baccalaureate degree at the University are competent writers. The essay written by the student for the exam should:

1. Answer the question and demonstrate logical consistency.
2. Sufficiently develop supporting evidence.
3. Possess clarity in sentence structure and word choice.
4. Show reasonable freedom from mechanical errors.

## **Methods of Data Collection**

Student grades on transfer English classes were obtained from transcripts submitted with the student's application for admission to Old Dominion University. If the student applied online or at a site other than 580, or if copies of the transcripts were not available in their file, transfer grades were then accessed through ODU's student information database, BANNER. Student pass or repeat scores on the EEWP were accessed on the Old Dominion University's Writing Center web page link to Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency results. All data were collected solely by the researcher.

## **Statistical Analysis**

A chi-square matrix was used to determine the significance of the findings. Student scores on transfer English classes--either below 3.0, or 3.0 or above--were compared to their pass or repeat score on their initial attempt of the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency to determine if there was a correlation between the two.

## **Summary**

Chapter III outlined the methods and procedures used in this study. The study's population and variables were defined, and methods of data collection were outlined. The population was drawn from enrolled students at Old Dominion University's distance learning site 580, in Charlottesville, Virginia. Student's initial pass rates on the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency were compared to their grade point average in 100 and 200 level English classes at Piedmont

Virginia Community College. Transfer English grades were obtained from either transcripts in the student files, or Old Dominion University's student database BANNER. The data were analyzed for any correlation using the chi-square method. Chapter IV, Findings, will discuss the results of the study.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Findings**

The purpose of the study was to determine if transfer student's grades in 100 and 200 level English classes from Piedmont Virginia Community College are a predictor of initial pass rates on Old Dominion University's Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency. This chapter presents the statistical analysis of the data that were collected from the research.

### **Analysis**

A population of 125 undergraduate students at Old Dominion University's distance learning site 580 in Charlottesville, Virginia, was identified by the researcher as having taken the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency at least once during the study's specified years. One student was eliminated from the population due to receiving AP credit for his freshman English classes. Four additional students were eliminated because they were earning their second Bachelor's degree with Old Dominion University, and no freshman English grades were recorded for them. Each of the remaining 120 student's score of either pass or repeat on his or her initial attempt of the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency was recorded, and the students' grades in freshman English classes at Piedmont Virginia Community College were also recorded. Of the 78 students whose grade point average in transfer English classes was 3.0 or above, 62 students passed the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency on the first attempt, and 16 students were asked to repeat the exam. Of the 42 students

whose grade point average in transfer English classes was below 3.0, 26 students passed the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency on the first attempt, and 16 students were asked to repeat the exam.

A Chi-square analysis of student pass rates and Piedmont Virginia Community College freshman English grade point average resulted in a value of 4.315. See Table 1.

Table 1

*Chi-square Matrix*

	Passed Exit Exam	Asked to repeat Exit Exam
GPA of 3.0 or above in freshman English	62	16
GPA below 3.0 in freshman English	26	16

$$\chi^2 = 4.315$$

$$p > .01 = 5.410$$

$$p > .05 = 2.710$$

## Summary

Chapter IV presented the statistical analysis of the data collected from the study. A population was selected and reviewed. Members of the population who did not conform to the parameters of the study were excluded. A chi-square test was used to determine if a correlation exists between Freshman English grades at PVCC and the student's initial pass rate on the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency. The following chapter, Chapter V, will summarize the study, draw conclusions, and make recommendations based on the data collected from the research.

## Chapter V

### Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This chapter will review and summarize the research that was conducted, and it will draw conclusions regarding the data obtained from the study.

Recommendations for the use of the information obtained will be discussed, as will recommendations for future research projects.

#### Summary

The purpose of the study was to determine if a relationship exists between a student's grade point average in freshman English classes at Piedmont Virginia Community College, and his or her success on the initial attempt of Old Dominion University's Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency. The hypothesis stated prior to data collection was:

H<sub>1</sub>: There will be higher likelihood of a student passing the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency on the first attempt if that student's overall grade point average in Piedmont Virginia Community College English classes is 3.0 or higher.

A chi-square test was used to determine if a relationship exists between a student's grade point average in Freshman English classes, and his or her ability to pass the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency on the first attempt.

The population studied consisted of 125 Old Dominion University

undergraduate students at the distance learning site located at Piedmont Virginia Community College in Charlottesville, Virginia. Included were students who had taken the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency at least once between 2007 and 2010. Student grades on transfer English classes were obtained from transcripts submitted with the student's application for admission to Old Dominion University. If the student applied online or at a site other than 580, or if copies of the transcripts were not available in their file, transfer grades were then accessed through ODU's student information database, BANNER. Student pass or repeat scores on the EEWP were accessed on the Old Dominion University's Writing Center web page link to Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency results.

In 2008, nearly three quarters of Old Dominion University's distance learning graduates indicated that prior to beginning their studies with ODU, they had completed an Associate's degree at their local community college (Office of Assessment, 2008). The Associate's degrees that are used as transfer credit at ODU include both 100 and 200 level English composition classes, commonly referred to as Freshman English. While all community college class content is reviewed by ODU prior to accepting a class for transfer credit, ODU has virtually no control over the quality of writing produced by students in these classes. According to Kilpatrick (1993) a significant number of teachers are themselves unable to produce adequate writing samples, which leads to questions about how capable those teachers are of training their students to be writers.

There are many ways for a student to raise his or her English grade that do not include demonstrating competent writing skills (Carroll, 2002). The use of

service learning projects and other extra credit activities can result in a student with substandard writing skills receiving an 'A' in a writing course (Meyer, 2006). The use of adjunct professors to teach freshman English classes may not offer students adequate instruction—some community colleges do not even require adjuncts to have prior teaching experience (PVCC website, 2010). An inexperienced teacher combined with extra credit opportunities may result in students that receive good grades, but may not necessarily result in students who can write good papers. School districts that are feeling pressure to raise standardized test scores may neglect to teach students the professional writing skills that will be needed in the work force, preferring instead to spend instructional time 'teaching to the test' (Maninger, 2006).

Students quickly learn what a professor wants to see in terms of class assignments. Since there is not currently one universally accepted rubric for grading a writing assignment (Meyer 2006) each project is subject to the grading biases of the individual completing the evaluation. Any student writing sample is only as good as it is judged to be by that particular grader, at that particular moment in time. A writing sample considered by one professor to be worthy of an 'A' can just as likely be graded by another professor as only worthy of a 'C' (Meyer, 2006).

The limitations of this study were:

- Participants are limited to transfer students at Old Dominion University's Distance Learning Site 580 in Charlottesville, Virginia.

- Only those students receiving transfer credit for 100 and 200 level English classes were included.
- The study does not consider the amount of writing that the student has done in his or her Old Dominion University classes to be a relevant factor.
- The study looks at only the initial Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency attempt and does not consider the results of any subsequent attempts.
- The study does not consider the number of attempts required to pass the Writing Sample Placement Test to be a factor.
- The study does not consider the amount of time that has passed between completing the Community College English classes and the first Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency attempt to be a relevant factor.

## **Conclusions**

Again, the hypothesis stated prior to data collection was:

H<sub>1</sub>: There will be higher likelihood of a student passing the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency on the first attempt if that student's overall grade point average in Piedmont Virginia Community College English classes is 3.0 or higher.

The chi-square analysis produced a value of 4.315. Since this value is greater than 2.710 at the .05 level, we can accept the hypothesis. The researcher

concludes that there is a statistically significant correlation between an Old Dominion University student's grade point average in freshman English classes and his or her rate of success on the initial attempt of the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency. Students whose grade point average in freshman English classes at Piedmont Virginia Community College is 3.0 or above have a greater chance of passing the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency on the initial attempt, than do students whose grade point average in those classes is below a 3.0.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the data collected and analyzed for this study, the researcher makes the following recommendations:

1. Conduct a study that looks at the relationship between the amount of time that has passed since the student's last writing intensive course, and his or her rate of initial success on the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency. Although it may have been years since a student was enrolled in freshman English, a recently completed writing intensive course could refresh the student's writing skills to the point that it may affect his or her performance on the EEWP.
2. Develop an online writing refresher course for Old Dominion University students. The purpose would be to assist students with their writing skills in the event that immediate improvement was needed. There are currently writing resources available through ODU's Writing Center, but

none is written exclusively for ODU students (Writing Center, 2010). If a student is asked to repeat the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency, then the completion of this course could be required prior to any subsequent attempts. Also, a student could choose to complete the course prior to taking the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency for the first time, if he or she felt their writing skills were weaker than they would like them to be.

3. Conduct a study of the relationship between a student's age and his or her rate of initial success on the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency. Anecdotal evidence shows that younger students at site 580 are more uncertain about their writing ability than are older students. There has been no information gathered to suggest how, or whether, this personal self-confidence translates into a higher or lower rate of initial pass on the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency. If a relationship exists, the data could be used to guide students to the appropriate resources for additional writing practice and evaluation, prior to attempting the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency.
4. A study of the initial pass rates on the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency, based on declared major area of study at Old Dominion University should be undertaken. If a relationship is determined to exist, then students matriculating in those programs identified as having a lower initial pass rate could be encouraged to complete a

refresher writing course prior to the initial attempt of the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency.

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