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Correlation between Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency Results and Freshman English grades in Washington State Distance Learning Students

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Correlation between Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency Results and
Freshman English grades in Washington State Distance Learning Students

A Research Paper

Presented to the Graduate Faculty

of the Department of Occupational and Technical Studies

Old Dominion University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science

in Occupational and Technical Studies

By

Angela M. Musto

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APPROVAL PAGE

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

Dr. John M. Ritz
Advisor and Graduate Program Director

Date

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Angela M. Musto

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In August 1977, Helen Jones, the wife of Old Dominion University President Alfred B. Rollins Jr., noticed a decline in the composition skills of recent graduates (J. Ritz, personal communication, February 19, 2009). A task force was established to study the problem and make recommendations. From this research, the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency was created as a requirement of graduation from all bachelor degree programs beginning fall 1978 (Writing Proficiency Handbook, 2007).

Eleven years later, Old Dominion University expanded their Distance Learning program to Washington State. Three sites in the state offer bachelor, master, and doctoral degrees, with the largest percentage of students taking undergraduate courses. As transfer students, undergraduates usually possess an associates' degree from a community college. These classes are then transferred to the student's Old Dominion University academic transcript. English composition is one of the classes that students must have passed to be admitted to Old Dominion University.

When the researcher began employment as Assistant Site Director at the Olympic College site in Washington State, a trend similar to that discovered by Jones was noted (2006). Undergraduate students could not successfully pass the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency. This occurred as often as half of the time for first time test takers. This study was undertaken to discover if a

relationship between a student's freshman English composition grade and their success at passing the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency exists.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a relationship between Washington State undergraduate students' freshman English composition grade and their success on Old Dominion University's Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency.

HYPOTHESIS

To solve the problem, the following hypothesis was tested:

H₁: There will be a higher instance of students passing the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency on the first attempt if the student has received a grade of 3.0 or higher in their freshman English composition transfer course.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The majority of students entering Old Dominion University's undergraduate distance learning program in Washington State were part of the "Millennial Generation", born between 1982 and 2002 (Sixty Minutes, 2007). This was the first group of students entering higher education who have come of age when email, text messaging, and other abbreviated forms of written communication were their most common types of written expression. In addition, no formal writing instruction was part of Old Dominion University's undergraduate distance learning curriculum offered in Washington State, with the exception of Professional Writing, and the Interdisciplinary Studies Teacher Preparation degree program. Other programs of study have upper-division courses

designated as writing intensive, such as the Occupational and Technical Studies program's class, "Technology and Society". The only English composition instruction most students receive was during their first year of community college. These factors can hinder the development of advanced composition skills that are required later in the student's academic and employment career.

Increasingly, community colleges are taking the bulk of responsibility for teaching basic compositional skills, as more students are beginning their higher educational studies there. This population makes up the majority of students who transfer to Old Dominion University's distance learning programs. In addition, many four year universities' English departments' faculty are no longer teaching the basics of composition. Most introductory classes are taught by graduate students often focused on their own course work and not instruction. Senior faculty are relegated to teaching upper-level undergraduate and graduate courses, concerned with securing tenure, or focused on publishing research (Reynolds, 2003).

This study has been undertaken so students requiring additional skills to develop compositional proficiency can be identified early in their academic career at Old Dominion University. Additional educational resources can be offered so they can successfully complete the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency and graduate in a timely manner. These enhanced writing skills will also benefit graduating students in the increasingly competitive employment market. The lack of advanced writing skills in recent bachelor degree holders has been on the rise, according to business and industry leaders (Amos & Walters, 1985).

LIMITATIONS

The following limitations were recognized in this study:

- The population of the study was limited to undergraduate students attending Old Dominion University at the Olympic College distance learning sites during the 2006, 2007, and 2008 academic years.
- The grades of students who took freshman English composition from a community college were used in the study. No scores from College Level Examination Program (CLEP) were used.
- The only relevant score on the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency is the student's first attempt. Any attempt to pass after the initial test is not relevant to this study.

ASSUMPTIONS

The researcher made the following assumptions while undertaking this study:

- An adequate grade based on the standard 4.0 grade point scale used by colleges and universities is defined as 3.0 and higher for the purposes of this study.
- Successfully completing the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency is passing the test on the first attempt.
- All undergraduate students in the study received transfer credit for freshman English Composition, or the equivalent from a community college that was transferred as Old Dominion University's English 110C to their Old Dominion University transcript.

PROCEDURES

Data collection of grades from the student's community college freshman English composition class was compiled using transcripts submitted as part of admission to Old Dominion University. If paper copies of transcripts were not available, a search using the BANNER database of Old Dominion University was utilized. The computer records of Old Dominion University's Writing Center were audited for the student's pass or repeat status on the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency. Once data had been collected, they were analyzed using the chi-square method for relevant correlation between grades in Freshman English Composition and the student passing the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency on the first attempt.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following terms are relevant to this study:

- *Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency (EEWP)*: a three hour examination of a student's skills in English composition. It consists of presenting the student with a current events topic they must compose a 500 word essay around. Proper essay and sentence structure, relevant content, spelling, syntax, mechanics, and usage are evaluation tools (Writing Proficiency Handbook, 2007).
- *Freshman English Composition*: An introductory level composition class from a community college that transfers into Old Dominion University as the equivalent of English 110C, called "English Composition".

- *Writing Center*: Present at both Old Dominion University and most community colleges, a student service consisting of a trained staff of educators that aids students in fulfilling the institution's writing requirements and improving composition skills.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

Chapter I of this study introduced the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency at Old Dominion University and English composition at the undergraduate level. Chapter II is a review of literature of writing assessment in higher education, factors in assessing composition skills, prior research in assessing English composition, and research on the academic success of transfer students from a two-year to a four-year setting.

Chapter III provides the methods and procedures used during research and data collection. Chapter IV contains the finding of the study. Chapter V presents the summary of the research finding, conclusions to be drawn from them, and recommendations based on conclusions.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter will encompass an overview of writing assessment in higher education and factors educators consider when assessing composition skills. Prior research in assessing English composition will then be presented. Finally, research on the academic success of students who transfer from a two year community college to a four year university will be discussed.

WRITING ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The earliest example of large scale writing assessment in the United States was at Harvard University during the 1873-1874 academic year. A written test replaced the traditional oral examination for entrance to the university (White, 1994). This event was followed by many others that set the stage for establishing English composition requirements for students entering higher education.

In 1879, regional standards were developed by the Conference of New England Colleges for all students entering universities in the region, followed in 1894 by the creation of the National Conference of Uniform Entrance Requirements in English. Next, standardized testing programs for universities were introduced by the College Entrance Examination Board in 1901. The formation of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) followed in 1911, with competency testing for new educators beginning in 1929. Finally, Educational Testing Service was founded in 1947. This organization administers the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), an indicator of success in

undergraduate studies, as well as the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), an indicator of success in graduate level programs.

After the end of World War II, enrollment at colleges and universities increased dramatically when returning veterans took advantage of the Service Men's Readjustment Act of 1944, more commonly known as the GI Bill. Enrollment as much as doubled at some institutions in 1946 (Lloyd-Jones, 1992). The Conference on College Communication and Composition (CCCC), started by NCTE in 1948, met in Chicago of that year to fabricate strategies for handling increases in class size and overextended writing teachers. These combined factors helped change higher education from "a fundamentally egalitarian institution" (Witte & Faigley, 1983) that had previously served mostly white upper class males into a newly accessible education option for women and minorities as well as returning military servicemen.

In the wake of these major changes, Mina P. Shaughnessy emerged as one of the early innovators of Basic English competency for college students. As Director of the English Program in the Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge (SEEK) Program at City College of New York in 1967, Shaughnessy helped elevate basic writing as a field of academic scholarship. Through her research and observation of the needs of SEEK students, Shaughnessy assisted in creating a writing center, curriculum, and textbooks for teaching basic writing and advancing the concept of writing across the curriculum. Her founding of *The Journal of Basic Writing* in 1975 and publication of the text *Error and Expectations* about composition pedagogy in 1976 laid the groundwork for

emerging thought on how English composition is taught in colleges and universities (Summerfield et al., 2007).

With the evolution of student populations, administrators felt a new form of assessment should be put in place for general competency of basic composition skills. A 1986 report on GRE scores (Valentino, 1986) indicated that students performance decreased in 11 out of 15 subject areas, the greatest decline occurring in areas that required high verbal skills. It is important to note that most individuals who take the GRE are seeking admission to a graduate level educational program with most individuals already possessing an undergraduate degree. By 1983, 23% of colleges and universities reported some type of assessment tool was used to gauge writing competency after freshman composition had been completed by students (Greenberg et al., 1986).

FACTORS IN ASSESSING COMPOSITION SKILLS

When creating a writing assessment program, many decisions must be made. When will the test be given and who shall take it? What type of test should be created and how will it be scored? These answers vary from school to school and reflect the educational philosophies of the university. Lederman (1986) offers the compelling statement that, “the values of a group are symbolized in the tests one must pass in order to become a member of that group” (p. 42).

The majority of higher educational providers administer competency testing to every student. Currently, programs of study within universities are more fragmented than ever, with many courses requiring no intensive writing. In

a 1994 study of 4500 students at five Nebraska universities, 47% of students claimed they were rarely given essay tests. The same year, 17% of faculty at the University of Illinois reported using essay tests only for knowledge and not for problem solving or writing ability (Gardiner, 1994). Additional research indicated college graduates lacked many basic writing competencies, such as varying vocabulary and writing styles and selecting, organizing, and relating ideas into business letter format (Amos & Walters, 1985).

When to test students in their academic career is another factor for consideration. The second semester of the sophomore year is a common choice. Brand (1991) states that assessment at this time acts “as a check against decaying writing skills after your freshman composition requirement is completed” (p.16). This is logical, as most students will have completed general educational requirements and not have begun upper-division courses that complete the student’s degree program. For schools that adhere to a writing across the curriculum program, identifying students who lack basic writing skills but are entering writing intensive programs allow faculty to identify and assist them before they encounter academic difficulty.

Regardless of the type of test design chosen, assessment should be valid and reliable. Charney (1984) posits that a valid test “assesses what it claims to assess, so a valid writing assessment would be sensitive to a writer’s ‘true’ abilities” (p. 65). Wiggins (1993) offers that testing should be conducted in context: “Achievement should be validated by a person’s demonstrated ability to

use knowledge in the field” (p. 213). In short, the test given ideally should match a real life situation.

The most frequently used tests for writing assessment are writing samples and multiple-choice. While multiple-choice testing is much easier to administer and score, they tend to lack validity. According to White (1989), multiple-choice writing testing sends the message that “college writing has something important to do with guessing correct answers” (p. 114-115). A writing sample is a more logical choice, as “you can’t evaluate writing without asking students to write” (O’Neill, 1992, p.15). As chief investigator for The Conference on College Communication and Composition (CCCC), Purnell (1982) conducted a survey of English faculty at both community colleges and universities. Eighty percent of respondents agreed that a writing sample was “an integral and indispensable part of a test of writing proficiency” (p. 408).

As writing competency testing became more common in higher education, the CCCC met in 1990 to discuss a “position statement” regarding writing assessment. The final draft was presented in 1995, with the decision that no multiple-choice test can substitute for a writing sample to gauge competency. By using a forced choice test instead of an essay gives students the impression that good writing is simply grammatically correct writing.

With this in mind, the most effective writing tests are those that require higher level thinking skills. Darling-Hammond, Ancess, and Falk (1995) suggest assessment should require students “to evaluate competing viewpoints and use evidence in developing a persuasive essay concerning a topic of social

importance” (p.12). Administrators should be wary that the ultimate propose is not just assessing writing proficiency, but identifying and correcting deficiencies of both students and curriculum. Ideally, this will result in dialogue between faculty, greater credibility for freshman English programs, and stressing students take freshman composition classes more seriously (Sloniker, 1987). Additional benefits include the promotion of more consistency in instruction and grading and identify program weaknesses to ensure that students enrolled in upper-division courses are competent writers.

PRIOR RESEARCH IN WRITING ASSESSMENT

Much research has been conducted in the field of writing assessment. It is becoming more common for higher education institutions to incorporate writing competency into graduation requirements through either a portfolio submission or testing. Topics of research include the socio-economic and educational backgrounds of students, student age and work experience, as well as the effectiveness of different types of essay evaluation and testing conditions. Additional studies have been conducted on how to determine if any of the above factors have a significant effect on performance. Some trends have been noted and will be discussed in this section.

A study conducted by Belcher (1985) centers around the College Level Academic Skills Test (CLAST) overseen by the Florida Department of Education. It is given to sophomores in all community colleges as a requirement for the conferral of an associate in arts degree and for admission of upper-division status as a transfer student at state universities in Florida. The researcher

discovered that higher grades in freshman English composition significantly correlated to success on the CLAST. Another study conducted the same year (Belcher, 1985) examined if students taking remedial collegiate English classes affected their performance on the CLAST. No differences were found between groups that did and did not take these writing courses; the researcher assumed that those who took these classes may have improved enough to perform at the same level as students who did not need assistance with remedial skills.

Belcher (1998) also investigated why CLAST scores began to decline when students took more English classes in preparation for the test. Multiple-test score averages had dropped from 94.1 to 91.6 over a two year period, and the essay score average had dropped from 88.0 to 83.8. Unfortunately, no conclusion could be reached. Further study was recommended.

Another study (Ghaffari-Samai et al., 1994) was launched to search for a correlation between students taught by adjunct versus full-time faculty and scores on a writing assessment test. One thousand-three hundred and thirty-nine students were included in the sample culled from 49 classes. The test was given during the fall semesters of 1991 and 1992. No statistically significant difference was found between the students taught by adjunct or full-time faculty. A study by Pounds (1998) at the University of Northern Iowa examined if the grading of the school's Writing Competency Examination by graduate assistants, adjunct faculty, or full-time faculty made a difference in the scores given. A classic bell curve was observed by researchers in the grades earned, with no statically significantly change regardless of evaluator.

Finally, Bell and Olney (1990) searched for a correlation between grade point average (GPA), grades in English courses, and students native to the university versus transfer students from a community college in performance on the General Examination in English Competency at Southwest Texas State University. The sample included 1,843 students who took the test in March and June of 1988. Grade point average was found to be the most prominent predictor of success, with transfer students scoring lower than native students. The study further classified those at risk of academic disciplinary action or dropping out of the university as those who were community college transfers and all students who possessed a GPA of below 2.5.

ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF TRANSFER STUDENTS

Community colleges are playing a more prominent role in higher education in the twenty-first century. More college attendees are using these institutions as a gateway to earning a bachelor's degree. Pincus and Decamp's study (as cited in Galdstone & Gehring, 1993) show that while 75% of students entering a community college state their intention is to transfer to a four year university, only about 15% to 25% eventually do. Of those that make the transition, only another 10% to 15% will graduate.

Much has been written on the disconnect between community college academic success that fails to manifest at the university level. The extensive use of adjunct faculty, prominence of perceived grade inflation, and lack of academic rigor are a few of the factors cited (Montondon & Eikner, 1997). All can result in the phenomena defined by Hills (as cited in Cejda, Kaylor, & Rewey, 1998) as

“transfer shock”, a significant decline in GPA that often occurs in the first semester of a transfer student’s time at a four year institution. Several factors have been identified that point toward the academic success of transfer students at the university level.

Piland (1995) conducted a study of community college transfers who successfully completed a bachelor’s degree at San Diego State University in 1993. Of the 1,796 students who transferred into the institution, a sample of 300 was chosen that had entered from various community colleges in San Diego County. A significant correlation was found between degree attainment and a high number of credits earned at the community college. A high GPA in community college and transferring into a decided degree program was additionally noted in students who obtained a baccalaureate.

A similar study conducted by Montondon and Eikner (1997) compared the grades of transfer students with those of continuing native students to see if basic accounting skills learned at community college adequately prepared them for upper-level accounting classes. Much to the surprise of the researchers, transfer students performed better than their native counterparts. The study suggests that age may play a factor in the outcome, as transfer students in the study tended to be older than their native counterparts.

SUMMARY

Chapter II provided an overview of topics and research relevant to issues of English composition at the undergraduate level of study. Subject areas covered were a brief history of writing assessment, factors educators consider

when assessing English composition, research about methodologies to assessing English composition, and factors that determine the academic success of students who transfer from a community college to a university. Chapter III will provide details about the methods and procedures used in this study to collect the necessary data to make a comparison between success on the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency and a student's English composition grade.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Chapter III describes the methods and procedures that were used in the study. The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a relationship between Washington State undergraduate students' freshman English composition grade and their success on Old Dominion University's Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency (EEWP). The following sections provide details on the population, research variables, instrument design, methods of data collection, and statistical analysis.

POPULATION

The population of this study was comprised of 100 undergraduate students attending Old Dominion University's Distance Learning programs in Washington State who took the EEWP in 2006, 2007, and 2008. This included 27 students who currently attend classes, 63 that have graduated, and 10 who left the university without procuring a degree. The population reflected a broad representation of gender, race, age, and socio-economic standing, very different than that of a more traditional non-distance learning university's population.

RESEARCH VARIABLES

The independent variable in the study was the student's grade point average (GPA) in their freshman English composition course. GPAs were calculated on a 4.0 scale where a grade of "A" was equal to a 4.0. The dependent variable was the student's pass or repeat score on their first attempt at the EEWP. Only the student's first attempt scores on the EEWP was used in

data analysis. The hypothesis presented by the researcher was that higher grades would manifest as a greater chance of the student passing the EEWP on the first attempt.

INSTRUMENT DESIGN

The Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency is a three hour examination of a student's skills in English composition. It consists of a current events topic, or subject of interest in the student's area of study, that the student must compose a 500 word essay around. Proper essay and sentence structure, relevant content, spelling, syntax, mechanics, and usage are evaluation tools (Writing Proficiency Handbook, 2007).

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

Data on the student's freshman English composition grade were collected using transcripts submitted by the student as part of their admission paperwork to Old Dominion University. If a paper copy of the student's transcript was not located in the student's records in Washington State, the BANNER database was utilized. Scores on the EEWP were culled from the Writing Center at Old Dominion University's database. Both of these data sets were acquired directly by the researcher.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Statistical analysis was completed by using the chi-square test of independence. The researcher compared the student's freshman English composition grade with the student's pass or repeat score on their first attempt at the EEWP for a correlation between the two variables.

SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the methods and procedures used for data collection and analysis during the study. An overview of the population of the Old Dominion University's Washington State undergraduate students was presented. Next, a description of the research variables were named and discussed. Methods of data collection of freshman English composition grades and the results of the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency data were given. These data were then subjected to analysis using the chi-square statistical tool. The next chapter will present the findings from the research.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a relationship between Washington State undergraduate students' freshman English composition grades and their success at passing Old Dominion University's Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency on the first attempt. This chapter presents the statistical tabulations of data collected for this study that will be used to accept or reject the hypothesis of the problem statement.

DATA ANALYSIS

A population of 100 students who took the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency in Washington State was identified by the researcher. Eighteen were eliminated from the study because they 1) had taken the test during a year other than those specified in the study's limitations, 2) received the required freshman English credits through College Level Examination Program, or 3) were a second degree seeker who did not have freshman English grades in their Old Dominion University transcript.

The revised population of 82 was analyzed for a correlation of the first time pass rate of students on the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency and their freshman English composition grades. Data collection began on May 12th, 2009, and was completed on May 13th, 2009. Using the chi-square analysis resulted in a value of 4.27329. See Table 1.

Table 1

Chi-square Matrix

	Passed Exit Exam	Failed Exit Exam
GPA of 3.0 or higher in freshman English	57	29
GPA below 3.0 in freshman English	69	17

$$X^2 = 4.27329$$

$$p > .01 = 5.410$$

$$p > .05 = 2.710$$

SUMMARY

Chapter IV presented the statistical analysis for the study. Chi-square was calculated to determine if correlation exists between passing the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency on the first attempt and a student's freshman English composition grade. Chapter V will provide a summary of the problem, conclusions of the study based on the collected data, and future recommendations culled from this study.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the analyzed data and results of the study. Data were summarized, conclusions were drawn, and recommendations were made regarding the correlation between Old Dominion University's undergraduates freshman English composition grades and passing the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency on the first attempt.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a relationship between Washington State undergraduate students' freshman English composition grade and their success on Old Dominion University's Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency. The hypothesis presented was:
 H_1 : There will be a higher instance of students passing the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency on the first attempt if the student has received a grade of 3.0 or higher in their freshman English composition transfer course.

The Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency (EEWP) was created as a requirement of graduation from all bachelor degree programs at Old Dominion University, and freshman English composition is one of the classes that students must have passed to be admitted to Old Dominion University. The majority of students currently attending distance learning programs in Washington State came of age during the advent of electronic communication such as e-mail and text messaging. These types of communication lacked writing competencies expected in higher education. This fact, coupled with an increasingly competitive

employment market, makes the importance of possessing adequate writing skills for effective communication an important skill for recent graduates.

The following limitations were recognized in this study:

- The population of the study was limited to undergraduate students attending Old Dominion University at the Olympic College distance learning sites during the 2006, 2007, and 2008 academic years.
- The grades of students who took freshman English composition from a community college were used in the study. No scores from College Level Examination Program (CLEP) were used.
- The only relevant score on the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency is the student's first attempt. Any attempt to pass after the initial test is not relevant to this study.

The population of this study was comprised of 82 undergraduate students attending Old Dominion University's Distance Learning programs in Washington State who took the EEWP in 2006, 2007 and 2008. This included students who currently attend, have graduated, and those who left the university without earning a degree.

Data on the student's English composition grade were collected using transcripts submitted by the student as part of their admission paperwork to Old Dominion University. If a paper copy of the student's transcript was not located in the student's records in Washington State, the BANNER database was utilized. Scores on the EEWP were culled from the Writing Center at Old

Dominion University's database. Both of these data sets were acquired directly by the researcher.

Statistical analysis was completed by using the chi-square test of independence. The researcher compared the student's English composition grade with the student's pass or repeat score on their first attempt at the EEWP for a correlation between the two variables.

CONCLUSIONS

The hypothesis presented for this study was:

H₁: There will be a higher instance of students passing the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency on the first attempt if the student has received a grade of 3.0 or higher in their freshman English composition transfer course.

Data analysis using the chi-square statistic yielded a value of 4.27329. Using the table of significance, the researcher found the value exceeds 2.710 at the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the hypothesis can be accepted. Based on these findings, the researcher concluded that there is a direct correlation between Old Dominion University's undergraduates freshman English composition grades and passing the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency on the first attempt. Students who received a 3.0 or higher in Freshman English had a greater chance of passing the Exit Examination of Proficiency on the first attempt than students whose grade was below 3.0.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations were made by the researcher:

1. Additional studies should be conducted at other Old Dominion University distance learning sites to discover if the correlation is consistent. The research can be expanded to compare grading trends between specific community colleges or university's freshman English grades for signs of possible grade inflation. The inclusion of other English composition grades can expand the scope of the study for further correlations.
2. Freshman English grades can be used by academic advisors to identify students that may need additional assistance. They would be referred to the writing center, either locally or on the Old Dominion University main campus in Norfolk, Virginia. Additional assistance for composition can be found through The College of Arts and Letters Writing Tutorial Service.
3. One upper-division composition class should be required in all undergraduate disciplines during the junior year. A minimum passing grade determined by the student's academic advisor must be earned before attempting the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency. If the student fails to meet this benchmark, they would be referred to the writing center, either locally or on the Old Dominion University main campus in Norfolk, Virginia, for assistance. Until the minimum grade was met, the student would be ineligible to take the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency.
4. The replacement of the Exit Examination of Writing Proficiency with a portfolio submission completed during the student's senior year. This project could be similar to a thesis or dissertation submission required for

graduate and doctoral students. A long term writing intensive project could benefit students who suffer from test anxiety. The portfolio could be checked for progress by the student's advisor. Final approval of the portfolio would be by an independent, multidisciplinary review board made up of Old Dominion University faculty from various departments.

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