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# In Their Own Words: Using Students' Writing to Develop a Digital Manual for New College Students

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**Project Title**

In Their Own Words:  
Using Students' Writing to Develop a Digital Manual for New College Students

**Type of grant**

Cornerstone I

**Principal Investigators**

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**Final Report Submitted**

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**A) Original Goals**

Our project aimed to identify and classify various types of writing issues typical of Pace University Freshmen, with the later goal of developing digital instructional materials for both faculty and students at Pace University, as well as for high school teachers preparing students for college-level writing. In order to develop such an empirically-derived set of instructional materials, the data for the project includes authentic student writing submitted as part of placement testing procedures from recent years.

**B) Progress towards original goals made to date**

See below.

**C) Activities that have been completed to contribute to meeting/progressing toward goals:**

The goals of the project have been met in that we have completed a rigorous study investigating a large sample of Pace undergraduate students' writing. Specifically, the following activities were completed:

- Writing samples from 200 Pace undergraduate students were collected.
- Quantitative analyses of all 200 writing samples were conducted.
- In-depth analyses of a subset of 36 writing samples were completed.
- Results were summarized and prepared for dissemination.
- A paper detailing the results was proposed and presented at the New Jersey College English Association's annual conference on March 9, 2013. The title of the paper was "Aligning assessment and instruction: Using writing placement responses to design course materials."
- Topics for pedagogical resources, based on the results, were identified.
- Lesson plans were submitted to the *Thinkfinity ReadWriteThink* platform for review.

**D) Activities that have not been completed**

In our original plan, we thought we would need to work with a software designer to build templates for our lesson plans. We later learned that we do not need such assistance.

**E) Outcomes we have received as a result of the project**

Unexpectedly, but favorably, the results of the project have served as a valuable resource in the creation of a department-wide curriculum proposal. Additionally, the results will be shared with Pace University's English Placement Test Coordinator to ensure closer alignment between placement testing and first-year writing courses.

**F) We did not create a class**

This was not one of the project's goals.

**G) Impact on students**

Results of the project will have an impact on students in composition courses as the outcomes and expectations of these courses may be redesigned to align with the types of writing issues identified through the project. Results will also have an impact on students who use the writing center, as they will have access to a greater variety of relevant resources to help them with their writing. Finally, results will have an impact on future Pace students as new placement tests are designed to align with the results of the project.

**H) Impact on other faculty members**

Our project had an immediate impact on the faculty members who were involved in the project during the data analysis stages. The project has also had an impact on English Department faculty involved in making curricular decisions (such as the Curriculum Committee and the Director of ESL), as the results have relevance for faculty expectations of students in composition courses at Pace. Faculty who attend departmental meetings will also be made aware of the project and results. Eventually, if the results are applied in outcomes statements for various composition courses, the project will have an indirect impact on all faculty who teach composition. Finally, the results could also have an impact on faculty across the university teaching Writing Enhanced Courses (WEC), as they may design writing assessments relevant to students' strengths and weaknesses as identified through this project.

**I) Unintended outcomes**

There were no unintended outcomes.

**J) Change or benefit from outcomes**

The outcomes of our project have, so far, been greater than expected, as we have already found more uses for the outcomes than originally planned (i.e., effects on future placement exams and writing course curricula).

**K) How the project has furthered the Thinkfinity Cornerstone**

Once our lesson plans have been accepted, they will be accessible via the *Thinkfinity ReadWriteThink* platform for writing instructors, high school teachers, students, and parents.

**L) Future plans for sustaining the project**

We plan to continue the project through the following activities:

- Development of additional pedagogical resources for Pace University's Writing Center.
- Development of additional lesson plans to submit to the *Thinkfinity ReadWriteThink* platform for review.
- Further dissemination of the results in the form of an article submitted to a peer-reviewed journal.