

## **Sixteen Years of Success: Accelerated Learning in Educational Opportunity Program at UAlbany**

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### **Background**

The Educational Opportunity Program is a state funded program aimed at providing access to college for historically disadvantaged populations. To be eligible for the program, students need to provide clear documentation of family poverty. They must also be ineligible for regular admission academically. We recruit throughout the state, but the bulk of our students are drawn from the New York City boroughs. Typically, more than half are immigrants or the children of immigrant parents. I have been teaching in the program since January, '86, so my program memory dates to that time.

It is hard to isolate any one aspect of the program as the cause for its success. Students are provided counseling, financial assistance, and academic support, and this happens in an unusually integrated way. They are also asked to buy into the structure of the program as a condition of their enrollment.

As a teacher in the program, I have come to feel a vested interest in the overall success of the student. I do not simply teach the student in a class or two and then watch them move on. Our mission is to prepare them for other coursework and to support them in their struggles with that coursework, which in turn informs our preparation. It's an unusual situation, and I would venture to say highly rewarding precisely because our students not only need us, but do well with our support. I am a proud member of a team. It is, again, hard to measure the contribution of any one part of the program.

### **Talk**

In a recent issue of *Inside Higher Ed* (April 21, 2011), which I suspect many of you have read, Mike Rose writes about *Remediation at a Crossroads*. The piece begins anecdotally with a description of bored students being drilled in proper past tense forms for irregular verbs. Rose goes on to characterize this practice as typical of the "standard remedial playbook," which is "built on a set of assumptions...that have long ago been proven inadequate." He is quick to excuse the teacher, whom he characterizes as poorly

trained and underpaid, “teaching at two other colleges to try to make a living.” As a counter to that, he seems to describe what we have come to see as Accelerated Literacy Programming: “creating challenging curriculums that directly foster the kinds of writing skills and habits of mind needed for success in college. Or developing programs that link a writing course to a content course to provide a meaningful context for writing. Or placing those students who test low into credit-bearing freshman composition and providing additional support.”

There is much to commend in Rose’s analysis. We are, indeed, at a critical juncture in remedial education, though not for the first time. Remediation has been and continues to be under scrutiny, often by those who have no belief in the educability of non-mainstream students, often by those who have no vested political interest in spending public money on the enterprise. We are in a political climate in which the expenditure of all public dollars is under close scrutiny. People want results for their money, and they want those results to be tangible and measurable. So even those who may favor help to the unfortunate are not going to be able to defend programs that are not working. To counter those arguments, we need programs like Alps, programs like those here in Baltimore, programs like my own, which can be demonstrated to be cost effective by speeding up progress toward graduation and which can be thought of as clear demonstration that these students can and will be successful, will take advantage of second chances and/or break the cycle of poverty, when given the right kind of support.

That said, I would like to take mild issue with some of Rose’s approaches. First of all, it seems to me he is playing out of what I would call the “standard progressive playbook” by describing an approach to verb tenses as regressive. It’s true, certainly, that most students handle past tense verb forms with a natural proficiency. It’s also true that memorizing a list of them is separate from the more complex world of reading and writing. However, for many students for whom English is a second language, the English verb tense system, including a significant number of irregular verbs, is a struggle. And many students who have grown up in the states have done so under the influence of dialects that routinely, for example, drop the –ed ending on past tense verbs and the –s ending for third person singular present tense. The standard progressive playbook asserts the students’ right to their own language, but has never been successful in softening the

stigma associated with a failure to master these standards. We are not in a position to wish this away. We will be judged. I am also disappointed by the implication that any attention to language is by its nature remedial and regressive. He doesn't counter the example of drills on past tense with description of a discussion of finite grounding, punctuating nonrestrictive modification, attending to given and new, or overall strategies for coherence.

Those of us who labor on the front lines of service, working with underprepared students, know that this progressive, regressive dichotomy tries to force us into false choice between error focused attention on language and challenging, interesting, engaged reading and writing, which has, at least historically, largely been focused on literary texts and literary analysis and has not had a substantial language component. Freshman composition is a bit of an anomaly for students coming out of high school who have had, up to that point, largely a literature focused English program. The typical student coming out of high school has been taught literature, but knows little about writing, almost nothing about language. Most students will not be English majors, but have not been systematically prepared for discourse in other disciplines.

As teachers, even those of us who feel drawn to these students and these contexts, we are woefully underprepared, underpaid, overworked, and underappreciated. We are asked to do the impossible—perhaps a better way of saying it is that we are asked to help students accomplish the impossible, to achieve at least competent levels of literacy from the low levels they bring with them. And now they are being pressured to do so in a short period of time.

The surprising answer is that it happens. It can be done.

Changes in curriculum for the Educational Opportunity Program at UAlbany have had three major influences: external politics, including serious challenge to programs aimed at helping underprepared, nonmainstream students succeed; changes in curriculum policy within the English Department and university, moving away from a Freshman Comp requirement for all students to a Writing Across the Curriculum Program; pressure from program faculty to move the program from what Mike Rose has called “the standard

remedial playbook” to a more challenging, process based model. I would include in that, though, enough discomfort with the “standard progressive model” to pressure somewhat of a synthesis of the two, which I would call an approach to language that embraces attention to language but does not focus centrally on error.

In a sense, these outside pressures mandated changes, which in turn provided an opportunity to rework a flawed program, not only to accelerate progress towards graduation, but to accelerate progress toward literacy in the population being served. The overall tendency has been toward increasing success as measured in retention and graduation: from roughly 25% graduation rates in 1986 to roughly 70% in 2010. In my mind, that has much to do with the shift of focus within the curriculum, away from what Rose calls “the standard remedial playbook.”

I would like to propose this underlying belief about teaching writing: **YOU CANNOT TEACH WRITING BY REMEDIATING DEFICIENCIES.** Becoming a successful writer involves building competence and competence involves the construction of rhetorically contextualized text. Our job as teachers is not to remediate deficiencies, but to build competence, to understand the complex demands of literacy and help mentor students in their varied paths toward that goal.

## **Handouts**

### **Basic Principles**

1) You cannot teach writing by remediating deficiencies. Writing growth comes from building competence. The deficiency model is not only demeaning to its clients, but fundamentally misrepresents the activities of reading and writing. No one writes to avoid error or to construct a form. We write to make meaning and make human contact. We have to take our students seriously as readers and writers. However far they may be from the target, we need to assume they will arrive there in due time.

One reason the ALP model works is that it forces us to treat students like real readers and writers.

2) These courses should be taught by well compensated, highly trained, and committed professionals. You cannot relegate it to adjuncts or part time faculty.

3) The notion that we need to choose between a regressive attention to language or a progressive attention to expression is false and damaging. Grammar is not and should not be a remedial subject. Form shouldn't be approached as though it were a neutral conveyor of meaning. We need to pay serious attention to how writing is working when writing is working well. We need to ask what knowledge about language is useful in reading and writing, for teachers and students alike. That means, to some extent, that we need to learn how to do what we have never been trained to do. And in so doing, we can move this communal enterprise forward.

4) Our job is to demystify literacy as much as possible and mentor students toward their academic and career goals. That means, in most cases, that we are not training English majors. We need to understand the kinds of reading and writing competencies required for success in all majors, including the technical fields.

### **A Brief History of the Program since 1986**

In 1986, when I first joined the program, half of our students entered through our six week summer program and half entered in the fall. Students were placed in two levels of non-credit writing on the basis of a writing sample and in two levels of non-credit reading on the basis of a standardized test (Nelson-Denny). The curriculum in writing was focused on remediating deficiencies. Students worked their work through a workbook process focused first on correct sentences, second on correct paragraphs, third on the five paragraph theme. Students could "test out" of either class during the semester by doing well on a timed writing sample. Students did a research paper as a final project in the second level, though in practice it was such a huge jump from the five paragraph theme that the results were best charitably described as awkward. The reading sequence had some study skills and some reading comprehension exercises (short texts). There was no strong coordination between the two. Most students were still taking non-credit coursework in the spring semester. Five and six year graduation rates were around 25%. Students graduated from the sequence into Freshman Comp, which was taught primarily by graduate student Teaching Assistants.

Early changes: Students no longer “tested out” within a semester, but passed or failed on the basis of the entire work of the course, as measured by portfolio assessment. We added reading focused journals and built revisions into the structure of the course.

Late 80’s: The University eliminated Freshman Comp and replaced it with a Writing Across the curriculum Program. We were then given the primary responsibility for preparing our students for university writing, for moving on to courses where writing was called for, but not often taught.

1992: All incoming EOP students were required to come in through our five week summer program. Students who came in through the summer were outperforming fall admits by a wide margin.

1994: The election of George Pataki as governor (defeating incumbent Mario Cuomo) brought programs like ours into close scrutiny. The overall question was whether any remediation should occur at our colleges or (especially) university centers. Close scrutiny brought our own program into prominence precisely because our graduation and retention rates were rising in dramatic fashion. Though the program was cut considerably state wide—the pie was smaller—we received a larger share of the resource. But pressure was on to speed progress toward graduation, and we did so by creating what we call “High Intensity” courses, five day a week support for three credit course. We also phased out our reading courses and introduced a college transition course out of the Educational Psychology department: a three credit course offered college wide during the academic year, mixing study skills, career exploration, and college adjustment.

2010: We added a concurrent course model for our weakest students (as measured by our initial testing.) Students simultaneously register for a non-credit writing course AND a 3 credit course (Analytical Writing) that fulfills Writing Intensive requirement.

Current Program      Projections for 2011-12

#### Summer Program

140 students, all enrolled in “The Written World”. The course itself does not carry credit, but three assignments count toward credit and grade for the University 100 course.

Belief or Value: Students define a belief or value and describe its experiential roots.

Synthesis paper: Students take an issue on growing up in America, using at least two reading sources from summer reading.

Library assignment: students find books and articles by and about an author.

Placement: Initial placement recommendations are made on the basis of incoming testing in both reading and writing. Final placement recommendations are made on the basis of those tests plus the students’ performance in our summer program. As a general pattern, students in our lower level course will be reading below tenth grade level as measured by our standardized test.

Fall semester: Approximately 25 students will take English 100 (Analytical Writing), which fulfills the lower level writing intensive requirement, concurrently with a non-



experience. You will do a first draft and later, graded revision. Minimum length: 750 words.

**Cultural Exploration / Synthesis paper:** This paper will require you to draw on at least two of the reading sources we have read as a class in constructing a paper organized around a perspective of your own. You will practice using parenthetical in-text citations (MLA) and include a bibliography. It is expected that paper topics will evolve from journal writing and class discussions. You will do a first draft and later, graded revision. Minimum length: 1,000 words.

**Exams:** There will be an essay exam based on the readings and a short final exam focused on effective sentence construction and standard punctuation.

**Library Orientation:** We will complete a short orientation to the library, and each student will complete a bibliography exercise designed by your instructor. You will practice finding books and articles using the computer catalogue and electronic indexes. We will also attend a library session focused on effective evaluation of sources on the web.

**Word Processing:** You will have an orientation to the EOP computer room early in the first week of classes. After that orientation, the computers will be available to you during study hours and at other times, as announced. Additional computers on campus may also be available. You are expected to do all your writing for the course on the word processor. Please keep us posted on difficulties you might be having with that.

#### **SCHEDULE OF MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS:**

- July      7: Bambara, "The Lesson" (182). Journal 1.  
            9: Marshall, "from Poets in the Kitchen" (197). Journal 2.  
           12: First draft, Belief or Value paper.  
           13: Tan, "Mother Tongue" (27). Journal 3.  
           13, 14, 15: Web research, library. (differs by teacher.)  
           15: Ortiz-Cofer, "Silent Dancing" (386). Journal 4.  
           19: Puzo, "Choosing a Dream: Italians in Hell's Kitchen" (225)  
              Torres, "A Letter to a Child Like Me" (165). Journal 5  
           20: Belief or Value paper revision due for grade  
           22: Sawaquat, "For my Indian Daughter" (54). Journal 6.  
           23: Rodriguez, "Does America Still Exist?" (357) Journal 7  
           26: First draft, Cultural Exploration / Synthesis paper.  
           27, 28, 29 : Library orientation. (differs by teacher.)  
           30: Essay Exam
- August    2: Cultural Exploration / Synthesis paper revision due for grade.  
            4: Library project due  
            5: Final Exam (language)





- 21: G & B Three, “The Art of Quoting” (42-51)
- 22: Rodriguez, “Aria: Memoir of a Bilingual Childhood” (Cohen, 326)
- 24: Paper One draft, Literacy Narrative (3-5 typed pages).
- 28: G & B Four, “Yes/No/Okay, But: Three Ways to Respond” (55-67)
- 10/1: A Response to One of Our Essays (2-4 pages).
  - 4: Tannen, “Agonism in the Academy: Surviving the Argument Culture” (G & B 219)
  - 5: G & B Five, Six. “And Yet”, “Skeptics May Object” (68-91).
  - 6: Ericson, “The Ways We Lie” (Cohen, 174)
  - 7: G & B Seven, “So What? Who Cares? Saying Why it Matters” (92-104)
  - 8: Paper One Revision Due for Grade
  - 12: G & B eight, “As A Result: Connecting the Parts” (105-120)
  - 14: G& B nine, “Ain’t So, Is Not: Academic Writing Doesn’t Always Mean Setting Aside Your Own Voice.” (121-128)
  - 15: Paper Two Draft, Literacy as a Public Issue (3-5 pages).

#### Unit Two: Issues of Identity

- 18: Ortiz-Cofer, “The Myth of the Latin Woman: I Just Met a Girl Named Maria” (Cohen, 112).
- 19: G & B Ten, “But Don’t Get Me Wrong: The Art of Metacommentary” (129-138)
- 20: Hurston, “How it Feels to be Colored Me” (Cohen, 206)
- 22: Response Paper Two: Ortiz-Cofer or Hurston
- 25: Cooper, “A Clash of Tiny Sparks: Remembrances of a Gay Boyhood” (Cohen, 120)
- 26: G & B Eleven, “I take Your Point: Entering Class Discussions” (141-144)
- 27: Mairs, “On Being A Cripple” (Cohen, 267)
- 29: Paper Two Revision due for grade.
- 11/1: Mukherjee, “Two Ways to Belong in America” (Cohen, 298)
- 2: G & B Twelve, “What’s Motivating This Writer: Reading for the Conversation” (145-155).
- 5: Paper Three draft: Identity as a Public Issue. (3-5 pages)

#### Unit Three: King’s “Letter From a Birmingham Jail”

- 8: King, “Letter From a Birmingham Jail” (Cohen, 220)
- 9: Summarizing King
- 10: Quoting King
- 11: Responding to King
- 12: Why does it matter?
- 15: Researching the context
- 19: Paper three revision due for grade
- 22: Response Paper three (King).

#### Unit Four: A final focus on language

- 11/29-12/6: Rhetorical grammar and punctuation
- 12/8: Exam on language

Grades: Grades for Eng. 100 will be based on 1,000 points total, with 900-999 in the A- to A range, 800-899 in the B- to B+ range, and so on. Grades for Writing Program Two will be pass/fail, with a passing grade contingent on a passing grade (C or better) for the Eng. 100 course.

Attendance: 100 points for four or fewer absences. five absences equals 80 points. -5 points for each additional absence.

Three response papers: 100 points each.

Three major papers: 150 points each.

language exam: 150 points.

### **Course Syllabus Eng. 121Z 10668 Fall '10**

Teacher: Craig Hancock

office: ULB97A 442-5188

hours: M. 1:45-3. T. 11:30-1. W. 1:45-3. Th. 11:30-1. F. 11:30-12:15. Other times, by arrangement

e-mail: [hancock@albany.edu](mailto:hancock@albany.edu)

TEXT: *Literature: A Portable Anthology*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. editors: Gardner, Lawn, Ridl, Schakel.  
Various handouts

### **COURSE GOALS**

- 1) To deepen your love and appreciation for literature.
- 2) To see literature as a living tradition. Whether literature from the past can still speak to us will be a continuing question in the class. We will also read a considerable amount of work by living writers and consider how literature is or can be a living cultural force.
- 3) To develop ways to look at literature and a language we can use to talk about it. You should leave the course with ways of looking at literature and talking about literature that will help you in further reading and in other literature courses.
- 4) To develop an aesthetic. I want each of you to be able to articulate an understanding of what you believe good literature is or should be and to develop some sense of the value of literature within your own life and within communal public life. I want to make this a central part of the classroom discussion and debate. I expect this to be a dynamic and changing belief and hope each of us (teacher included) will be open to influence and change.
- 5) To stimulate understanding of literacy. To develop a sense of the importance of literacy within your own life. To develop literacy goals and move toward those goals.
- 6) To develop competence and confidence with writing, both informally and formally, through journals, essay exams, and polished papers.
- 7) To encourage a diversity of insights and perspectives. This will not be a course in which literature is taught to you, but a course in which we explore literature together.
- 8) Special Concern: Relationships between language and literature. We will look closely at the nature of GENRE and the role of language in carrying out its purposes.

### **Tues. & Thurs. Support Classes**

This is a HIGH INTENSITY course, specially designed to give additional support and assistance to beginning college students. Activities scheduled on Tuesdays and Thursdays will include writing workshops, small group work, optional and mandatory conferences, and other activities scheduled as the need arises. When mandatory activities are scheduled, except for the first and second week, each of you will be required to attend on Tuesday OR Thursday. These will be officially scheduled activities, and an absence will count as an official absence (see attendance and grades later in the syllabus.)

## READING ASSIGNMENTS

The course will divide roughly into three units: on short fiction (the short story), poetry, and drama and film. In all cases, assignments are to be read before the date assigned for class discussion.

## WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

This is a writing intensive course, and writing will be a substantial and integral part of what we do.

Writing Exercises and reflections: The writing assignments for the course will include three exercises aimed at deepening our understanding of language and genre. These may be shared with other members of the class in writing group; some may be copied for whole class discussion. Other exercises will ask you to reflect on the nature of specific assigned texts or on other class related issues. I reserve the right to add additional assignments in response to class discussions and interests.

Major papers: Papers will require a first draft (or progress report) and later revision, but papers do not need to be limited to two drafts. Early drafts can be awkward and exploratory, but I expect final papers to be thought through and fully realized. A great deal of assistance will be structured into the course, some of it mandatory, some of it voluntary. If you are having difficulty with an assignment, I should be well aware of it. Come for extra help.

Paper one: Literacy narrative. (explanation to come.) 4-6 typed pages.

Paper two: The excellence of a story or poem. 4-6 typed pages.

Paper three: An essay on aesthetics (what you believe good literature is or ought to be, with particular poems, stories, and/or plays as examples.) This will include a research component, what one author says about his or her own goals as a writer. 6-8 typed pages.

EXAMS: There will be three essay exams, one for each unit of the course.

GRADES: Grades for the course will be on a 1,000 point system, with 900-1,000 in the A range, 800-899 in the B range, etc. Maximum points for course activities will be as follows:

3 writing exercises:	50 points each	(150 total)
Other journals:		(200 total)
first two papers:	125 points each	(250 total)
third paper:	150 points	(150 total)
exams:	50 points each	(150 total)
attendance*:	100 points	(100 total)

\*fewer than five absences = 100 points

five absences = 80 points

each additional absence = -5 points

## READING ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSIGNMENT DATES

Aug. 31: Hughes, "Theme for English B" (504)

Sep. 1:: Ortiz-Cofer, "Cold as Heaven" (697)

Soto, "Mexicans Begin Jogging" (695)

2: Sundiata, "Blink Your Eyes" (678)

3: Writing Exercise One: Rendering a Scene from a clear Point-of-view

- Cisneros, "The House on Mango Street" (414)
- 7: Li-Young Li, "The Gift"  
Cervantes, "Freeway 280" (704)
- 8: Carver, "Cathedral" (305)  
Journal One: Plot analysis of "Cathedral"
- 13: Kincaid, "Girl" (403)
- 15: Tan, "Two Kinds" (405)
- 17: Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues" (250)  
Journal Two: Story as Exemplum or "A Character Facing Problems"
- 20: Alexie, "What You Pawn, I Will Redeem" (438)
- 22: O'Brien, "The Things They Carried" (375)
- 24: First draft, paper One: Literacy narrative
- 27: Walker, "Everyday Use" (368)
- 29: Ha Jin, "The Bridegroom" (416)  
Journal three: the excellence of a story
- Oct. 4: Oates, "Where Are You going, Where Have You Been?" (318)
- 6: Garcia Marquez, "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" (294)
- 8: Paper One Revision due for Grade
- 11: Pound, "The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter" (559)  
Robinson, "Richard Cory" (548)  
Hayden, "Those Winter Sundays" (587)
- 13: Komunyakaa, "Facing It" (673)  
Hongo, "Yellow Light" (686)
- 15: Fiction exam
- 18: Blake, "The Lamb", "The Tyger", "London" (485-487)  
various poems (handout)
- 20: Blake, continued
- 22: Writing exercise two, What's in a Word?
- 25: Hughes, "Harlem" (577)  
various poems (handout)
- 27: Hughes cont'd.
- 29: Journal 4. A poem as a typical Hughes poem.  
Paper two first draft: The Excellence of a story or poem.
- Nov. 1: Dunbar, "We Wear the Mask" (548)  
Keats, "When I have fears that I may cease to be" (503)  
Heaney, "Digging" (650)
- 3: Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" (543), "The Second Coming" (544),  
"Sailing to Byzantium" (546)
- 5: Young, "A Dance for Ma Rainey" (654)  
Erdrich, "A Love Medicine" (706)  
Nye, "The Small Vases from Hebron" (689)  
Writing Exercise three: dramatic conversation (a score for two actors)
- 8: Poetry exam
- 11: Ives, "Sure Thing" (1164)
- 12: Paper Two revision due for grade
- 15: Miller, Death of a Salesman (1026) Act I.
- 17: Death of a Salesman, Act II (1062)
- 19: Death of a Salesman, Requiem  
Research Journal (journal five) What a favorite writer says about writing.
- 22-12/1: film unit (to be announced)
- 29: Final paper draft or progress report. Essay on Aesthetics.

Dec. 8: Film and drama exam  
10: Final paper due for grade. (Exam period).