

Academic Year 2008/2009 Assessment Report
Intensive English
Fairmount College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Intensive English

First Problem identified: Cheating, including plagiarism, continues to be a problem although less of a problem since instituting a cheating policy two years ago.

Solution stated: The formal *Intensive English Language Center Consequences of Cheating Policy* was put into effect in September, 2007, which has had a positive effect in lowering instances of cheating. However, in the higher levels we are still seeing plagiarism. Therefore, teachers of higher level writing and/or research writing skills classes are training in Blackboard and also the software program *Safe Assignment*. Additionally, we have rather large populations of students from several countries. If 40% to 60% or more of the students in class are from the same language group, cheating seems to be more prevalent. When teachers use seating assignments, separating same language groups, the opportunity to cheat or try to cheat is reduced and becomes much less of a problem. Another way students cheat is by using textbooks that have been totally consumed, so they are reading somebody else's answers and not thinking for themselves. Therefore, we are beginning to use alternate texts in some classes in various levels such that students cannot use a used book.

How change/solution will be implemented: As the upper level writing teachers become more familiar with Blackboard, it will be implemented in the classes. Because Blackboard uses *Safe Assignment* to detect plagiarism, students will have a more difficult time defending themselves when the program does detect plagiarized material, and that responsibility will no longer place a burden on the teacher. As has been true in the past, cheating continues to occur among returning students who continue breaking rules and new students who are testing the system. We anticipate that the use of seating charts and the periodical changing of certain texts will help in this regard. We will continue to monitor the effect of all of these methods to minimize and/or eliminate cheating.

Second Problem identified: Attendance continues to be a problem with some students in spite of the formal policy we established and implemented in October of 2007.

Solution stated: The teachers agreed that the policies in the *Intensive English Language Center Attendance Policies* have had a positive effect on attendance and tardies. They also agreed that it is most effective when all teachers follow through with these guidelines, as were delineated in the 2007/2008 Assessment Report. Nevertheless, chronic absentee students and new students testing the system still keep the absentee rate higher than we would like, although absenteeism is somewhat lower than it was last academic year. Additionally, teachers are reporting to the director when a student has been absent for several days for no apparent reason, such that a student's absenteeism is being reported earlier so that the director can address the problem with that student.

How change/solution will be implemented: We will continue to enforce the *Attendance Policies* in all classes in all levels, and the teachers will continue to report absenteeism early. It is hoped that the enforcement of the policies and early reporting will reduce the absentee rate even more. Over the last four sessions, a number of students have not passed some classes due to absenteeism, but they usually are better at attending classes the following session. We will continue to monitor the effect of the policies and early reporting on reducing absenteeism in our program.

Third Problem identified: The need for students to make “normal progress” in our program was addressed for the first time last September. It is not uncommon for some students to repeat a level once, which is not desirable, but is acceptable. However, to repeat a level two or three times is not acceptable because that means it takes three to four sessions just to pass one level. Students are encouraged to attend class faithfully if they are repeating the level so they can be successful and move on to the next level at the end of the session/semester.

Solution stated: We now have two means of notifying students that they must pass a given level or seek another program to attend. First, as was implemented in the Fall II session of 2008, a *Dismissal Warning Letter* is sent shortly after the session begins to students who are repeating a level informing them that they must pass the level that session/semester. If they do not, they will be asked to find another program to attend at the end of the semester. So far, four students have transferred out as a result of failing to make normal progress, and four students were dismissed from our program. Two of those students begged to be allowed to continue; one of them changed his behavior, passed the level, and has become a very responsible student; the other continues with some bad habits. The second means of notification is with the Mid-Term Progress Report wherein students are notified that they are failing one or more classes with Ds or Fs. In the *Additional Comments* on that report, the director writes words of encouragement, but also reminds them that they are repeating the level and they need to pass in order to continue in our program.

How changes/solution will be implemented: Since this is an ongoing problem, we will continue with the *Dismissal Warning Letter*, notification of possible dismissal from the program in the *Mid-Term Progress Reports*, and, finally, the actual *Dismissal Letter*. We will keep track of each student’s behavior and progress after receipt of either the first or second warning or both.

Addendum: As a result of the implementation of the solutions to the First Problem and the Third Problem, we had a 2.7% increase in the number of students proceeding through our program in a timely manner: 83.4% in 2008/2009 compared to 80.7% in 2007/2008. It is our desire that this percentage increase even more as we continue to hold students accountable to attend classes and limit the number of times they may repeat a level.

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