

Quality Initiative Summary Report – NMSU Policies & Practices

Prior to developing NMSU’s Quality Initiative (QI) to improve student writing, NMSU-system campuses collected data related to student success in writing. Data was collected by English faculty at all five NMSU campuses, and data related to the Las Cruces and Grants campuses are presented in this document. Additional information was collected as part of the QI project.

NMSU established “*Power of Five*” teams to collaborate across NMSU-system institutions regarding general education courses and learning outcomes. Each team included a member from each of NMSU’s five system campuses. The English 111G (first year Rhetoric and Composition course) *Power of Five* team attended the New Mexico Higher Education Assessment Association (NMHEAA) summer retreat in 2012 to address ongoing concerns about student success in English 111G (ENGL111G) courses, with a goal to develop system-wide strategies to increase student success in ENGL111G. Data used to inform the *Power of Five* team was collected across the 2009-2013 academic years.

Studies showed that the average ENGL111G pass rate was 67% across all campuses (78% for NMSU-LC; 58% for NMSU-Grants). Success rates for ENGL111G were low for students with high school GPAs below 2.5 (49% pass rate at NMSU-LC). Low institutional retention rates were prevalent in the following semester for students that failed ENGL111G (for NMSU-LC, students enrolled in the following semester at a rate of 81% if they passed ENGL111G and at a rate of 31% if they failed ENGL111G). Our data suggest that High School GPA is a better predictor of success in ENGL111G than either Composite or English ACT scores.

Table 1 – Pass rates for first time freshmen at NMSU-LC

Composite ACT	Pass rate	English ACT	Pass rate	High School GPA	Pass rate
> 26	84%	> 26	88%	4.0	99%
22 – 25	84%	22 – 25	86%	3.5 – 3.99	91%
17 – 21	83%	17 – 21	83%	3.0 – 3.49	83%
0 – 16	75%	0 – 16	77%	2.5 – 2.99	69%
				< 2.50	49%

Correlation between Composite ACT and pass rate = .829, p value = .171 (n=4); SD of percent passing is 4.36

Correlation between English ACT and pass rate = .969, p value = .031 (n=4); SD of percent passing is 4.80

Correlation between High School GPA and pass rate = .978, p value = .004 (n=5); SD of percent passing is 19.73

To better understand conditions that may impact student success in ENGL111G, we looked at a variety of data points. We found several practices that may negatively influence a student’s success in ENGL111G. First, data shows that NMSU maintains the lowest required English ACT for entrance into the first year English composition course compared to our peer institutions – NMSU requires a minimum English ACT score of 16; benchmark score for College Readiness is 18.

Second, cap enrollment in the first year English composition courses at NMSU (ENGL111G) is higher than all of our peer institutions, and higher than the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) recommends (NMSU caps at 27; recommended cap is 20). Excluding Texas Tech University, the minimum class size of peer institutions is 20 and maximum is 26, resulting in a mean of 23.7143. The standard deviation is 1.7288. When compared to NMSU-LC class size of 27, NMSU is 1.9000 standard deviations greater than the mean of the comparison institutions.

Quality Initiative Summary Report – NMSU Policies & Practices

Table 2 – English composition class size and required ACT

University	Course Enrollment Cap for NMSUENGL 111G equivalent courses	25 th -75 th percentile ACT English	25 th -75 th percentile ACT Composite
New Mexico State University	27	17-23**	18-23*
Iowa State University	26	21-28	22-28
Montana State University	25	20-26	21-27
Oklahoma State University	25	21-28	22-27
University of Arizona	25	NA	NA
University of Idaho	25	19-26	20-26
University of Texas at El Paso	25	NA	NA
Washington State University	25	NA	21-26
University of Nevada	24	19-26	20-26
Utah State University	23	20-28	21-27
University of Wyoming	23	20-26	21-27
Colorado State University	22	21-27	22-27
Kansas State University	22	NA	NA
University of New Mexico	22	18-25	19-25
Oregon State University	20	NA	NA
Texas Tech University	35 (with online response readers @ 1:17 ratio)	20-26	21-26
AVERAGE of Peers	23	20-26	21-27

NA = information not available

**A composite score of 18 indicates that 32% of test takers are at or below this level; a composite of 23 indicates that 69% are at or below this score. For the graduating class of 2009, the national average ACT composite score of test-takers was 21 with the average English score at 20.6.*

***The Benchmark English score for College Readiness is 18.*

In addition, 1 of the 4 credits required for ENGL111G is technology based; studies found that access to technologies (internet other than through cell phone) was insufficient for students to communicate, research and learn outside of their writing courses. Data indicates this online component further contributes to low student success rates.

A further compounding factor is that 22% of students enrolled in non-international sections of ENGL111G at NMSU-LC are English language learners (ELLs) – individuals for whom English is not their first language. Additional data indicates that 14% of first year NMSU undergraduate students report speaking a language other than English at home, and nearly 20% of students using the Writing Center report their first or home language as Spanish; the next largest group reports their first or home language as Arabic (6%).

Over the period of this study entrance requirements to NMSU have changed. However essential minimum required English ACT score for entrance into ENGL111G has not changed.

Quality Initiative Summary Report – NMSU Policies & Practices

Table 3 – Admission Requirements to NMSU-Las Cruces

Regular NMSU admission requirements (2011-12 catalog – 2015-16 catalog):		Regular NMSU admission requirements beginning Fall 2016:	
1.	High school GPA of at least 2.0 and ACT composite score of at least 20 <i>OR</i> High school GPA of at least 2.5 AND ACT composite score of at least 21	1.	High school GPA of at least 2.75 <i>OR</i> Ranked in the top 20% of their graduating class <i>OR</i> ACT composite score of at least 21/SAT score of 990
2.	English – 4 high school units, including 2 units of composition, one of which is a junior or senior level course	2.	English – 4 high school units, including 2 units of writing-intensive courses, one of which is a junior or senior level course
3.	Science – 2 high school units beyond general science	3.	Science – 2 high school units beyond general science
4.	Math – 3 high school units from algebra I, algebra II, trigonometry, or advanced math	4.	Math – 4 high school units including completion of algebra I, geometry, algebra II and one additional math course
5.	Foreign languages or fine arts – 1 high school unit	5.	Foreign languages or fine arts – 1 high school unit

Table 4 – NMSU English Writing Requirements

Enrollment/prerequisite requirements for ENGL 111G – Rhetoric and Composition – 4 credits (2011-12 catalog – 2014-15 catalog):		Enrollment/prerequisite requirements for ENGL 111G – Rhetoric and Composition – 4 credits, beginning Fall 2015:	
1.	English ACT score of 16 or higher for fall/spring semester enrollment/20 or higher for summer enrollment <i>OR</i> Successful completion of a developmental writing course or equivalent	1.	English ACT score in English of 16 or higher or a Compass score 76 or higher <i>OR</i> Successful completion of one developmental writing course for English ACT scores of 13-15 or Compass scores of 35-75 <i>OR</i> Successful completion of two developmental writing courses for English ACT scores of 12 or below or Compass score of 34 or below
2.	Second writing course – 3 credits that meet NM Common Core and discipline degree requirements: Options include Business and Professional Communication; Writing in the Humanities and Social Sciences; Technical and Scientific Communication; Advanced Composition; and Advanced Technical and Professional Communication	2.	Second writing course – 3 credits that meet NM Common Core and discipline degree requirements: Options include Business and Professional Communication; Writing in the Humanities and Social Sciences; Technical and Scientific Communication; Advanced Composition; and Advanced Technical and Professional Communication

NMSU is also an outlier compared to other higher education institutions in the state of New Mexico regarding writing course requirements: NMSU has a 1 course/4 credit requirement; all other institutions have a 2 course/6 credit English composition requirement. This means that NMSU students have one semester to achieve the concepts that students at other institutions achieve across a two-course, two-semester sequence.

NMSU writing requirements do include a second, 3 credit, 200- or 300-level writing course (as do other institutions across the state), selected from 5 courses that are intended to be introductory courses to discipline-area writing (Business and Professional Writing; Writing in the Humanities

Quality Initiative Summary Report – NMSU Policies & Practices

and Social Sciences; Technical and Scientific Communication; Advanced Composition; Advanced Technical and Professional Communication). These courses were designed for students to take in their sophomore or junior year, after declaring a major. However, most continuing students complete the second writing requirement in their second semester – often before they’ve settled on a major.

NMSU’s required Viewing a Wider World (V) courses (upper-division general education courses) are designed to include writing requirements. However, these courses are required to be outside of the student’s discipline area, therefore, writing is not in the discipline of the student’s degree.

To qualify as a VWW course, the course must satisfy all of the following criteria:

1. Be upper division (300-400 level) and appropriately rigorous
2. Must not have prerequisites beyond those required for all 300-400 courses
3. Include scholarly activity appropriate to the discipline, including one or more of:
 - a. A research project or structured, documented inquiry in the form of information gathering, evaluation and formal presentation
 - b. A creative arts activity or project
4. Include *learning outcomes which require writing that demonstrates the integration of knowledge*
5. Include at least one student learning outcome addressing one or more of the following:
 - a. An international experience or examination of international issues
 - b. Examination and analysis of multicultural issues
 - c. Investigation of interdisciplinary approaches to the subject matter
 - d. Analysis of ethical issues

Table 5 - Viewing a Wider World (VWW; designated as “V” courses) – course requirements

Viewing a Wider World requirements – 2 courses (6 credits) required (2015-16 catalog):	
1.	At least one course must be in a college other than the student’s home college
2.	VWW courses taken in the student’s home college must be in a department different from the student’s home department and cannot be cross-listed with a course in the student’s home department
3.	Courses counted for “V” credit on the student’s transcript cannot be counted as a requirement for the student’s major
4.	One of the courses (3 credits) can be replaced by study abroad experience consisting of at least four weeks of a Study Abroad program or university coursework in a foreign country earning 3 credits
5.	<i>Nine (9) credit hours or course work outside the student’s home department may substitute as one VWW course (3 credits)</i>

NMSU has no additional institutional writing requirements for students. Specific disciplines may or may not include writing in their curriculum.

Current policy and practice may present challenges that are difficult for students to overcome, thus impeding persistence in students obtaining their educational goals as well as developing strong disciplinary success in writing. It may be that institutional policy introduces underprepared students into ENGL111G and then further exacerbates challenges with technology requirements, large class size and relatively large populations of ELL students. Furthermore, NMSU students miss out on a semester of intensive writing, compared to their peers at other institutions of higher education across the state. Combined, these factors may confound NMSU goals for persistence, retention, and ultimately degree achievement for New Mexico’s diverse populations.