Role of the English Discipline at BCC

Brief History

The English Discipline has played a vital role in the college since its inception, under its various titles (primarily Vista College and Vista Community College). During the 1980s and before, the discipline had a very active creative writing program, as well as courses in reading and composition, as well as literature. Since then, as the state has emphasized transfer, CTE, basic skills, and ESL, the transfer and general education components of the discipline have grown, with the creative writing and literature offerings shrinking. Unlike the other colleges in PCCD, however, the discipline has retained core offerings in creative writing and literature. It has recently introduced an AA-T in English, which primarily focuses on literature. During the past six years, as a result of active and ongoing responses to assessment findings within the discipline, the basic skills component has changed significantly, as described below.

Goals of the Department

The mission of the English discipline at Berkeley City College is to provide all students with strong, college-level skills in reading, writing, research, and critical thinking. English courses at the college tend to fall into four broad categories: Reading and composition, literature, creative writing, and foundational (“basic skills”) courses. In addition to communication, courses in English address the following institutional learning outcomes: Critical thinking skills, information competency, and global perspectives and valuing diversity. Through its foundational courses especially, but also through its general education courses and A.A. degrees, the department addresses the advancement of student access, equity, and success.

Purposes of Courses and Programs

Basic Skills/Foundation Courses and Support Courses: English 264AB (Preparation for Reading, Composition, and Research, foundational skills), English 208ABCD or 258ABCD (Writing Workshop, support)

General Education Courses: English 1A and 5 (two courses in the “Golden Four”); English 1B

Certificate and A.A. Courses: English 1A, 1B, 5, 85A, 85B, 85C, 17, 50 (English AA-T); English 1A, 10A, creative writing electives (English Writing AA), creative writing sequences, 10B, 71A-74, 86-89, 91A-94 (creative writing certificates)

Transfer Focus: English 1A, 1B, 5, 17A or B, 85A, 85B, 85C (UCB or CSU English majors); English 1A, 10A (SFSU creative writing majors), English 47 (Education AA-T)

Writing Electives: English 14 and 15 (Non-Fiction Writing), English 120 (Journal Editing), English 130 (Introduction to English Syntax and Grammar)

Contract Education: English 201A and 201B (Preparation for Composition and Reading), English 21 (Film: Art and Communication)
Course Clusters and Sequences

Basic Skills/Foundational to English 1A Old Sequence:

English 269A → English 201 (English 101 for PACE) → English 1A
(shortest version)

English 269A → English 269B → English 201A → English 201B → English 1A
(longest version)

Basic Skills/Foundational to English 1A New Sequence:

English 264A → English 1A
(shortest version)

English 264A → English 264B → English 1A
(longest version)

English AA-T:

English 1A
English 1B
English 5
English 85A
English 85B
English 85C
English 17A or 17B or 50

Pathway for English Majors at UCB:

English 1A
English 1B
English 5
English 85A
English 85B
English 85C
English 17A or 17B

Creative Writing Certificates:

Fiction Writing Certificate: English 1A (prerequisite), 10A or 70A, 71A, 72A, 73A, 74
Playwriting/Screenwriting Writing Certificate: English 1A (prerequisite), 10A or 70A, 86, 87, 88, 89
Poetry Writing Certificate: English 1A (prerequisite), 10A or 70A, 91A, 92A, 93A, 94

English Language/Writing AA:

English 1A and 1B
Literature Electives (3-4 units from 17A or B, 47, 50, 85A, 85B, 85C)
Writing Electives (12 units from 10A or 10B, 14, 70A or 70B, any of the cr. wr. certificate courses)
Role in Interdisciplinary Programs and Learning Communities

Many sections of English 264, 208, and 1A, as well as some sections of English 5 and 1B, are components of learning communities, primarily in PERSIST and First Year Experience, but also in PACE, HUSV, and Global Studies. English classes are also included in interdisciplinary AA programs, including the Education AA-T.

Role of Noncredit Curriculum

As of now, no noncredit courses are offered in the English discipline. However, it might be worth exploring the use of noncredit for foundational and support classes.

Special Characteristics

Instructional assistants and tutors are critical in the success of students in foundational courses and transfer-level English, particularly English 204 and 208, which rely on embedded support. The department works actively in recruiting, training, and scheduling writing tutors.

As of Fall 2015, the English discipline at Berkeley City College is one of the largest in the college; it provides students with strong skills in reading and writing, critical thinking, and research skills (primary institutional learning objectives) and aids in preparing students for transfer, CTE, or other goals.

The structure of the program is different than that of BCC’s sister colleges in Peralta, as a result in part of assessment work leading to acceleration strategies in BCC’s foundational English courses and in part of BCC’s small literature and creative writing programs. Though the ratio of foundational to transfer general education courses across the four colleges was similar in 2012, the breakdown of numbers of students in different types of classes now is significantly different at BCC (see attached chart).

Programs

The discipline awards the following degrees, as detailed on page two:
- an English AA-T
- an associate of arts degree in English language/writing

The discipline awards certificates of completion in creative writing focusing on
- fiction
- playwriting/screenwriting, or
- poetry.

Students who complete the English AA-T simultaneously complete the requirements for transfer to U.C. Berkeley and many other schools (such as U.C.L.A., U.C. Santa Cruz, and all California State Universities), which partially accounts for the high transfer rate of English majors from Berkeley City College to U.C. Berkeley (over 80% over the last five years) and other colleges. This sequence is likely to be similar to the U.C. Pathway for English majors currently under development in the U.C. system.
The majority of sections of English classes offered at the college are those general education classes in reading and composition which are required of all students who wish to transfer to four-year colleges or otherwise matriculate (English 1A, 1B, and 5), and foundational courses which help underprepared students to ready themselves for these higher level courses (English 204 and 208).

Student Achievement Data

According to the B.I. tool, in the 2014-15 academic year, 12 A.A. degrees in English were awarded (10 AA-T, 1 English Language/Writing, and 1 English Language and Literature).

Retention rates in the English discipline have remained steady between Fall 2012 and Spring 2015, varying from 73.72% to 79.47%. In Spring 2015, the retention rate was 78.64%. Summer rates were consistently higher, ranging from 80.78% to 83.03%.

Course success rates have also remained steady over the past three years (Fall 2012-Spring 2015), ranging from 64.36 to 66.53%, with the high of 66.53% in Spring 2015. Summer success rates have been a bit higher, ranging from 69.94% to 74.31%. Currently, a subgroup of the Equity Taskforce is examining ways to improve success rates of students in foundational courses, including English, ESL, and mathematics.

Assessment

Every semester, all students in all sections of English 1A and 204/264 (over 30 sections), as well as ESL writing classes, participate in a portfolio assessment; the results of this assessment are analyzed departmentally and used to make improvements in the classes. Student work in other classes (including English 17, 85A, 85B, 85C, 91, 92, 93, 94, and others) is assessed, based on rubrics developed for each class or series of classes. In some classes, such as English 208, student surveys or classroom assessment techniques are used for course assessment.

Results of portfolio assessments have led to a revamping of English and ESL foundational courses which provide enhanced instruction in an accelerated framework. Assessments of literature classes at the college have led to the development of a “lit crit” website and the development of assignments and materials used commonly by instructors of English 85A, 85B, and 85C. Student surveys of the writing workshop (English 208) have led to improved curriculum and materials for students.