OSU remedial English course urged

By RAY HUGHES
Ohio-Journal Staff Writer

Remedial English composition, last offered at Ohio State University in 1968, may make a comeback.

Reinstatement was one of several recommendations by a committee appointed to study student writing skills in the College of Arts and Sciences.

The six-member committee, headed by astronomy Prof. Terry Roark, found as suspected that writing skills had slipped and that something should be done about it.

THE COMMITTEE WILL present its report next Tuesday to the Faculty Senate which appointed it.

The study was spurred by a nationwide concern over the decline in writing and English skills among high school and college students.

The committee also suggested placement testing for new students, more written assignments and essay exams, expanding basic English requirements and a validation procedure.

Based on classroom work, the English Department estimated 25 to 30 percent of its freshmen ranked at the remedial writing level.

THERE WAS WIDESPREAD faculty feeling that most juniors and seniors did little better, the report said.

The university should not have to be in the remedial business, Roark said. But until society and secondary education can send students to college prepared with the necessary skills, the university should make the remedial instruction available, he said in the report.

The committee said its report was an attempt to construct a justifiable university-level answer to a problem that goes deep into the heart of the community school system.

ITS RECOMMENDATIONS are aimed at providing students with basic tools to use in their college education.

The remedial composition course would not be a punishment. A person unable to read and write fluently cannot fully benefit from a university education, the report said.

The committee estimated in 24-member class units remedial teaching costs would be about $65 per student, with another $45 in indirect costs.

IDEALLY, THIS REMEDIAL instruction should be in even smaller class groups, which would further increase costs, Roark said.

It was important, the report said, that full costs of remedial instruction be borne by the students it benefited or by the Ohio Board of Regents.

The committee suggested expanding the English requirement to include an advanced composition level. This level would be taken the junior or senior year and would offer students a choice of an advanced composition course oriented toward one of the three areas of basic education: humanities, social sciences or natural sciences.

WRITING PLACEMENT tests should be given new and transfer students entering the college to determine if they should start in remedial, beginning or advanced composition classes. Roark felt this part would be the key to the committee's recommendations.

Present college scoring programs do not satisfactorily measure the ability of most students to write clearly.

The report emphasized that departments outside English courses should continue giving students practical experience in expository writing by assigning papers, reports and by using essay examinations. This work should be graded on both clarity as well as content and the student informed what portion of the grade was assigned to each.

IT WAS EASY, THE REPORT said, to justify not using essay exams or failing to assign written work by saying "classes are too big" or "students don't write well enough for me to assign papers."

Whatever the reasons, the failure to assign written work is one of the important causes of our students' writing deficiencies, the report said. We often demonstrate just how important writing is by not requiring it.

THE REPORT ALSO suggested refresher workshops in evaluating writing skills be offered faculty on a free and voluntary basis.

The committee also proposed creating a validation examination, much like the placement test, as a graduation requirement to help evaluate how the program worked.
Problem at OSU a prime example

Many colleges forced to give remedial courses

By GENE I. MAEROFF
The New York Times Service

Plagued by increasing numbers of students who are unable to write coherent sentences or handle simple arithmetic, more and more colleges and universities are finding they have to offer remedial work in such basic skills.

Few institutions of higher education, including some of the most prestigious, have been able to escape the problem, and mounting alarm among college officials has produced growing efforts to deal with student deficiencies. These efforts have brought budgetary difficulties and disagreement over how to label remedial courses and whether credit should be given for them.

HERE AT OHIO State University, placement tests administered to freshmen, all of whom entered the open-admissions university on a first-come, first-served basis, show that 26 per cent have not mastered high school mathematics and 30 per cent cannot write on an acceptable college level.

As a result, both the English and mathematics departments are preparing full-scale remedial programs.

One of the country's most highly selective institutions, Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore — where it is said that "tremendous" writing has shown up even in doctoral dissertations — is weighing the imposition of a compulsory composition course for students who cannot pass a placement test.

Cleveland's Case Western Reserve University, imitating in part programs at Stanford in California and Simmons in Massachusetts, plans to open a writing center next fall for students.

Columbia University this year replaced a freshman English seminar emphasizing literary texts with a composition course that will emphasize writing skills.

"You have to reach the point where everyone is convinced there is a problem," said Dr. Sigmund R. Susskind, dean of undergraduate and graduate studies at Johns Hopkins. "We know by now there is a problem and so do the kids. Something will have to happen."

THE DECLINE in student achievement, detected by the colleges and universities, reflects a nationwide trend that has shown up on many tests, including those of the College Entrance Examination Board, the American College Testing Program and the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

While the precise causes of the nation's declining scholastic achievement remain a matter of debate, many theories have been offered.

There is speculation on the possible adverse influence of television, a possible weakening in the teaching of fundamentals in elementary schools and the effect of a more flexible curriculum that permits students to stay out of the most rigorous high school courses.

FURTHERMORE, some discussion centers on the fact that dropout rates have diminished and many students now going on to college would not have done so in past years. Some observers maintain, too, that more ill-prepared students are enrolled because institutions are lowering their standards in competing for students.

"What we're concerned about," said Joseph Landin, chairman of Ohio State's mathematics department, "are gaps in these skills going all the way back to elementary school, skills that we expect them to have by the time they reach college — being able to add fractions and extract square roots, knowing basic geometric concepts and not being confused by percentages."

The problems at Ohio State, whose 49,914 students constitute the nation's largest single-campus enrollment, in many ways exemplify the situation of the academic world.

OHIO STATE has been going through controversy on whether to label the courses it expects to offer as "remedial" and whether they should carry college credit.

Some professors at Michigan State and Penn State are uneasy over allowing students to gain credit for what amounts to high school work taken in college.

But other faculty members disagree.

"There's enough of a stigma without denying credit," said Mary Davis, an instructor in Michigan State's remedial composition program. "If you stack too much against the students, they lose all incentive to work."

The word "developmental" is used on many campuses to try to avoid the remedial connotation.

FINDING FUNDS to pay for remedial education at a time of tight budgets is a difficulty many universities face.

Ohio's Board of Regents, maintaining the taxpayer should not be charged a second time for something they have already paid the high schools to accomplish, has refused to pay for remedial programs. So, Ohio State is juggling its budget to pay for the remedial classes.

The effectiveness of remedial education, however, is a subject of great controversy. A report from City University of New York's (CCNY) Branch College concluded: "A majority of students improve very little in writing ability regardless of the instructional mode."

Remedial courses costly but needed

By Mary Bunnell

Ohio State spends more than $200,000 each year to teach freshman how to write and compute math, but the problem is one which all state-supported institutions must cope because of its open admissions policy, admitting all who apply until the freshman class is full.

The departments of English and mathematics at OSU have instituted remedial programs and elaborate placement tests to bring approximately 2,000 freshman up to normal levels of achievement. The trend is nationwide.

Ohio State President Harold L. Enarson said, in a speech Oct. 24 to the National Parents and Teachers Association, that the universities can either accept their burden as "costly and time-consuming," or "push it back down the educational ladder," where the inadequacies are many and stem from a variety of sources.

"In the old days, anybody scoring below calculus level was considered in need of help," said John W. Riner, vice chairperson of the Department of Mathematics.

Today, the figures are alarming, Riner said. "Some people are appalled to see how bad off these kids are," he added. Of the entering freshman class at OSU this year 27 percent were placed in the lowest math level, compared to 16 percent in 1967.

Ten years ago, 44 percent of entering freshman placed in the highest levels; this year, only 34 percent were at the top.

Riner said the university has provided approximately $100,000 a year for the remedial program — consisting of different levels of Math 100 — since it began Autumn Quarter 1976.

Riner agreed such funds could go to good use for other programs in the department, but said Ohio State also needs students' tuition and subsidies which would be lost should selective admissions begin.

"It's hard to say how else the money could be used, because it is allocated through academic affairs just for that purpose," he explained.

Sara Garnes, director of the Writers Workshop, for freshman with inadequate English skills, said the approximately $100,000 used for the workshop would probably be reallocated to other departments to pay for fringe expenses, like visiting professors.

The workshop, established this fall, enrolls 1,055 freshman in English 100.01 and 100.02. "Their ACT scores, which range from 1 to 15 out of a possible 36 points, determine which section they are placed in."

The goal of the workshop is to help students write clear, coherent, well-organized paragraphs with few grammatical errors, Garnes said.

After the workshop, the next step is English Composition 110, where the main target is good essay writing, she said.
Remedial English classes successful OSU program

By Terry Trimper

Remedial English classes have a positive factor built in. The classes seem to be working.

Four years have passed since the initial pilot project of remedial English classes began. A "Report of the Writing Workshop" describes some successes and failures of the program, but probably the most encouraging factor is the improvement seen in the students' writing skills.

The report was written by several staff members from the Writing Workshops for the dean of the College of the Humanities and the Department of English.

Students improved overall an average of 15 percent since the installation of the pilot project, according to the report.

"This increase reflects an improvement in rhetorical skills — the ability to state clearly a main idea and to develop that idea in a coherent, unified paragraph by means of facts, examples or illustrations," the report stated.

The pilot project, which consisted of English 192X, was offered to incoming freshmen who scored 10 or below on the English section of the American College Test (ACT) and 14 or below on the composite score.

"The mean English ACT score (on a scale of 1-33) had fallen from 20.3 in 1969 to 18.8 in 1975," according to the report.

The 67 students who completed 192X autumn quarter 1976 received an average grade of C minus in freshman composition the following quarter.

A control group of students who took freshman composition only attained a D average.

Since then, the Writing Workshops, English 100.01 and 100.02, are required of freshmen scoring 10 or below and between 11 and 15 on the English portion of the ACT, respectively. Freshman composition is now English 110.

After winter quarter 1978, 453 students received an average grade of about C minus in English 110 after taking 100.02 the previous quarter. The following spring quarter, 238 freshmen received an average grade of C in English 110 after taking 100.01 and 100.02.

These figures echo the feelings of some of the Writing Workshop instructors. Mary E. Clark, a 100.01 lecturer, said she sees an improvement in her students' work and they often tell her the workshops help them write better papers for other classes. The workshops are limited to 15 people.

Suzanne Karpus, a 100.01 lecturer, said she sees a lot of improvement in her students' take-home essays. She assigns a number of rough drafts, and students then revise and reorganize them.

Very few of the students who placed in the workshops could have passed English 110 the first time around, Karpus said.
Proposal to limit remedial courses

By Bob Keim

High school students completing a recommended college preparatory program should be able to make a smoother transition to college.

In the first-ever joint meeting Monday of the state Board of Education and the Ohio Board of Regents, the Advisory Commission Between Secondary Education and Ohio Colleges presented a nine-point plan to better prepare high school students for college-level courses.

Enrollment in college remedial courses will be reduced greatly if students follow the recommendations of the commission, according to Sherwood Fawcett, commission chairman and president of Battelle Memorial Institute.

"If these plans are carried out, we will save millions in remedial education costs," Fawcett said.

Edward Q. Moulton, chancellor of the Board of Regents, said "we want institutions to say this is the minimum requirement to go to college without remediation."

The recommended curriculum for high school students includes four units of English with an emphasis on composition and minimum of three units of math, one of which is taken during the senior year. Three units each of social studies, science and foreign language also were recommended.

Completion of this college preparatory program should be required for unconditional admission to private and public four-year colleges and universities the commission members said.

The new requirements are not an attempt to eliminate the open admissions policy, said Franklin B. Walter, superintendent of public instruction. Non-college preparatory students could still be admitted but might have to take remedial courses, he added.

In other recommendations, the commission called for improved teacher education and asked teachers to increase student writing experiences and toughen work and grade requirements.

The commission also called for college requirements to be "clearly stated and communicated to educators, students, parents and the general public."

"We are trying to get the student to take the program to avoid the prospect of remedial work later," Walter said.

Moulton said this will reinforce the high school counselors who advise students to follow such a program, only to have other people give the student different advice on college requirements.

"Now is the time to get more fully prepared students to college."

He added this is a rejection of the open, flexible high school curriculum of the '70s.

Copies of the report will be sent to all colleges and universities in the state.

The cooperation between the Board of Education and the regents Monday is the first of its kind, Moulton said, and has laid the groundwork for further partnerships.

The 15-member commission was appointed in September by the Board of Education and the Regents and charged with developing a college preparatory curriculum that would reflect collegiate expectations for entering students and reduce the need for remedial coursework.
20% of students need remedial courses

By Tim Dodin
Dispatch Higher Education Reporter

About one in five freshmen attending Ohio’s colleges and universities need remedial courses in mathematics or English, roughly the same as 14 years ago, said a report by the Ohio Board of Regents.

A higher percentage of those students, however, are taking the courses at the branch campuses of public universities and at two-year community and technical colleges, the report said.

"We have not seen a great divergence in the number of students needing remedial courses over the years," said Marlene Rushay, associate to the regents chancellor.

"What we are seeing is a shift in the system of higher education where statistically fewer students need remedial courses at the university campuses."

The regents’ study looked at students who graduated from high school in spring 1990 and enrolled at a state-supported college or university in summer or fall 1990.

About 22.5 percent of all entering students required remediation in math, and 20 percent required remedial English courses. In 1978, the percentage of newly graduated high school seniors requiring remedial English courses was 22.9 percent.

The shift is due, in part, to universities’ raising admission standards and two-year colleges’ offering cheaper tuition, Rushay said.

The study does not count non-traditional students, those over age 22 — who take remedial courses.

"The problem of students’ taking remedial courses is even worse than what it shows in this study," Rushay said.

At Ohio State University, about 10 percent of the new freshmen on the Columbus campus in 1990 required remedial math, and 5 percent required remedial English courses, the report figures say.

At OSU branch campuses, 41 percent took remedial math, and 6 percent took remedial English, the report says.

At Columbus State Community College, about 44 percent took remedial math, and the same percentage took remedial English. The college enrolls a lot of students who did not come directly from high school, and those who are returning high school graduates sometimes didn’t intend initially to continue their education and so didn’t take college preparatory courses, said Dave Patton, a spokesman for the school.

The Managing for the Future Task Force — a state task force that released a study in July of the public higher education system in Ohio — has recommended assigning primary, but not exclusive, responsibility for developmental and remedial education to community colleges.

The state gives a total of about $15 million a year to its public colleges and universities for remedial education. Columbus State, which spends about $550,000 a year in instructional costs for remediation, would like the state to give it more money for remedial courses. Many high schools are turning to college preparatory classes to better prepare students for college.

More than 63,000 high school students take the Early Mathematics Placement Testing Program each year. The test assesses students’ math skills so they can take the courses as seniors that will prepare them for college.

Many schools report that senior math enrollments have risen, and there are indications that students from high schools participating in the program need fewer remedial courses, the report said.

The state also has an early-assessment English program that identifies the writing skills of high school students.

### Remedial courses

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Source: Ohio Board of Regents

Dispatch graphic