Directed Self-Placement, Corequisite Models, and Curricular Choice

Becky L. Caouette

ABSTRACT: *The author argues that significant inroads in the destigmatization of basic writing courses and students can be made when students are asked to choose not only which FYW course they believe best meets their needs (directed self-placement, or DSP) but also to choose from among a variety of courses (including corequisite courses, particularly those that bear full graduation credit). Drawing from the author's own institution, the author demonstrates how some fortuitous events allowed her to reconsider and reframe FYW curricular offerings and placement methods. The article ends with a review of the unique difficulties inherent in fully implementing universal choice and several examples of how this approach continues to offer unanticipated local opportunities to destigmatize "basic writing."*

KEYWORDS: *basic writing; corequisites; directed self-placement; DSP; student agency*

Several years after I began my position as Director of Writing at Rhode Island College (RIC), our First-Year Writing (FYW) Program embarked on two different pilots: one, to create a new corequisite course offering under the FYW umbrella; two, to implement Directed Self-Placement (DSP) as the new form of first-year writing placement. In designing the pilots, I made a critical mistake: I did not create an assessment plan that would allow me to assess each pilot individually; instead, because I had launched both pilots in the same calendar year, they were inextricably meshed together.

It is only now, more than six years out from those pilots' beginnings, that I realize how fortuitous was my error. In the pages that follow, I theorize that successful destigmatization of "basic" writing in the postsecondary classroom[1] requires not only corequisite models (like accelerated learning programs [ALP], stretch, and mainstream), but also requires colleges and universities to embrace DSP in conjunction with these courses. Since the hallmark of both innovations is the element of choice—freedom to choose a course (DSP) depends on the opportunity to choose from among several courses (including corequisite models)—it seems logical that in order to offer

Becky L. Caouette is an Associate Professor of English and the Director of Writing at Rhode Island College. Her research interests focus primarily on writing program administration in first-year writing programs (including placement, articulation, and curricular innovation). Her teaching interests include visual rhetoric as well as multimodal and public writing.

students *genuine, unencumbered* choice, writing programs need to claim both DSP and corequisite models. Put simply, I do not believe that corequisite models can make significant inroads in destigmatizing underprepared or alternately-prepared students unless these same students are encouraged to choose which course best meets their needs.

Placement and the Corequisite Course at Rhode Island College

At RIC, DSP is *the* first-year writing placement method for our student population. A brief summary of the placement process at RIC will be of use here. Students who are expected to enroll at RIC attend Orientation-sponsored DSP sessions moderated alternately by myself or the Writing Center Director and with assistance from experienced FYW instructors as needed. The moderators collect minimal identification information (name, student number, and email) and ask students to do a bit of low-stakes reflective writing. Moderators then list the key attractions or opportunities of each course ("You might be interested in this course if...") and assume the rhetorical stance of asking students to "opt in" to a course. DSP documents and presentations highlight crucial differences and similarities among the courses, urge students to consider their own perspectives on writing and who they are as writers, and ask students to choose a course. Moderators make themselves available for questions and provide information on transfer credit; both the Writing Center Director and the Director of Writing's contact information are listed on the documents. Students then enroll in the course of their choosing the following day. During the first week of classes, instructors are asked to assign, read, and respond to writing samples for every student in their section(s). Instructors may discuss any concerns they have with a student (i.e., the student's writing sample might suggest a different placement choice would better suit the student's needs) or with me, but instructors are not allowed to move students out of sections—they must honor student choice. In this way, our method very much resembles the model introduced by Daniel J. Royer and Roger Gilles over twenty years ago ("Attitude").

One of the four courses students may choose is FYW 100Plus, the corequisite course piloted at the same time as DSP and now offered in fall and spring semesters. The course would be classified by William Lalicker's taxonomy as an "intensive" model much like that described by Mary T. Segall; it carries with it six credits, all of which "count" towards a student's full-time status, GPA, and graduation totals. FYW 100Plus meets the same

outcomes as FYW 100: students are just given more time (six credit hours instead of four) and resources (class size is smaller; a Writing Center tutor meets with students at least once a week; at least one class period a week is conducted in a computer classroom) to fulfill the requirement. There is no additional work assigned. While this course is not a new model, its iteration at RIC has changed since the first semester of the pilot and, important to my argument here, in conjunction with DSP.

Potential Points of Connection Between DSP and Corequisites in Contemporary Research

Lalicker's classification of "alternatives" to basic writing (BW) structures, published in the second issue of the *Basic Writing e-Journal* (1999), affords one of the earliest examinations of the potential relationship between DSP and corequisite models. Lalicker establishes a "baseline" model of BW—the prerequisite, remedial course—and then articulates five alternatives; they include the stretch, studio, mainstream, and intensive models. He also posits DSP as one of the alternatives even though he readily admits that it "isn't really a model in the structural sense: it can be used with a wide variety of course and credit arrangements." To his credit, Lalicker observes the opportunities to innovate that DSP brings to any alternative plan, and so I quote at length:

> But the attitudinal change it [DSP] seeks to foster in students—that basic writing is something students choose because they know they need it, rather than something forced upon them—may make a number of creative and effective course structure alternatives politically possible, even palatable, in the eyes of some constituencies (students, parents, faculty, administrators).

In this passage, Lalicker makes a prophetic connection between placement and course offerings, between two different ways of sponsoring student choice. While his article does not endorse DSP explicitly—he lists advantages and disadvantages to every model, DSP included—the above quotation provides a helpful example as to how an early articulation of alternative BW models considers DSP in the mix. Such a connection is not surprising given that DSP and a number of corequisite initiatives were introduced nationally within several years of each other. Kelly Ritter illustrates convincingly the presence of supplemental instruction in early BW programs at Yale and Harvard, so I don't mean to suggest here that corequisites were "invented"

twenty years ago; rather, I argue that the late 1990s and early 2000s brought an uptick in scholarly and administrative activity in corequisite innovation. Peter Adams published his early findings—findings that would lead to the corequisite movement of ALP—in 1993, though Adams et al. suggest ALP was implemented at various institutions "in the late 1990s and early 2000s" but not at his own institution (Community College of Baltimore County) until the mid-to-late aughts (55-56). Gregory Glau introduced us to the stretch model in 1996; Segall published her findings from her "intensive" model in 1995; Royer and Gilles' groundbreaking *CCC* DSP article appeared in 1998, and their edited collection was published in 2003. As the above list indicates, within a ten-year span Royer and Gilles introduce DSP, several pivotal articles on corequisites are published, and Lalicker makes a direct connection between DSP and corequisite models. Yet despite the focus on student agency in all of these conversations, there has been an absence of discussion about what happens when DSP and corequisites are brought together.

This is remarkable to me given that both initiatives focus on student empowerment in meaningful ways. For DSP, students are allowed to choose their FYW course(s). This method privileges student voices over institutional voices; it trusts students to make decisions based on all available information as well as students' own perceptions of their abilities, level of preparedness, and college expectations. In corequisites, institutions acknowledge the ways in which pre-requisite course(s) stigmatize students and delay or obstruct their progression through higher education. As Ira Shor remarks, "BW emerged soon after [the 1960s] as a new 'identity,' a new field of control to manage the time, thought, aspirations, composing, and credentials of the millions of non-elite students marching through the gates of academe" (93). Separately, DSP and corequisites work to empower students by fostering choice. It seems only logical, then, for institutions such as my own to consider how combining these two initiatives can maximize student agency.

Certainly, RIC is neither first nor alone in offering corequisite courses *and* DSP; while Royer and Gilles discuss DSP in relation to two courses ("An Attitude of Orientation"), other institutions—see, for example, Blakesley et al.—offer DSP in programs with multiple FYW course options including corequisites. However, a deliberate discussion of these two initiatives' influence on each other seems notably absent from the literature.

One near-example of the ways in which DSP affects curriculum is described by Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson et al. of Miami University in their 2001 article. Given the weight assigned to scored writing submissions, their placement model could not be confidently classified as DSP; however, I would

certainly argue that it is choice-based. The "Writer's Profile" asks writing instructors, serving as readers, to assess student submissions and to render a recommendation to the student; the student then chooses their writing course. The authors tantalizingly note that "Partly as a result of instituting the Writer's Profile placement, we have recently changed the choices of writing courses offered. Currently, we offer several choices for students" (174), providing a table that shows a basic writing course, a studio course (one credit), and a mainstream writing course. They go on to say that in reading student writing, where students may be "adequate" in some aspects of their writing but need additional support in others, a "perceived gap in our course offerings" was revealed which "led us to develop the Writing Studio Workshop" (182). Beyond this, they do not elaborate on the ways in which the Writer's Profile motivated the creation of an additional course—or how the new course affects their placement method. In this institution, then, choice in placement—even if it's not DSP—seems to have affected the curricular offerings.

Likewise, Polina Chemishanova and Robin Snead articulate a choice-based placement method at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP), though the choices seem limited to their studio model, *PlusOne*; they write that "Students were either placed in the Writing Studio [*PlusOne*] based on their diagnostic writing within the first two weeks of the semester and a portfolio of previous writing or *they self-selected to participate in the Writing Studio*" (172; emphasis mine), and go on to add that "the *PlusOne* writing labs are mandatory. . . for students enrolled in the College Opportunity Program" (175). Thus, the only choice allowed here is for those students who may wish to opt in to the *PlusOne* studio course; other populations are placed by the institution.

In both of these institutions, then, student choice in placement has restrictions. For Lewiecki-Wilson et al., even a small choice in placement led to responsive curricular innovation. For Chemishanova and Snead, opening up the *PlusOne* course to *any* student attracted an unanticipated group of students in their corequisite course. They write that "Initially, the *PlusOne* program targeted students who desired additional writing support or who had been previously unsuccessful in completing the composition sequence but has since expanded its focus" (175). One of the three groups now served by the course includes students who are particularly driven to achieve academic success given a competitive nursing program (175), but who were not the initial target student population for the *PlusOne* course. Unfortunately, here too there's little discussion of the ways in which this unexpected population

of pre-nursing students—present in the *PlusOne* course because the program allowed for student choice in placement—changed, improved, diminished, or affected the course. I am particularly interested in the experiences of Chemishanova and Snead because, as I'll discuss below, our experiences at RIC in some ways parallel theirs at UNCP. To be fair, neither article's research purports to address my questions regarding the relationship between DSP and corequisite courses. But as someone who has investigated the intersection of DSP and corequisites at my own institution, I have found only these small, enticing insights in the existing literature.

This is not to say that DSP is ineffective with a two-course FYW curriculum (that's how Royer and Gilles began, after all), nor am I insisting that schools turn to DSP if they offer corequisite FYW courses (lots of institutions still place students into their corequisite courses). Twenty years out from Lalicker's acknowledgement of the potential influence DSP may have on "alternatives" to BW, my goal here is to illustrate what that influence might look like: how corequisite courses, initially meant as a "middle ground" between BW and mainstream courses, could potentially upend expectations of course offerings and support student agency *when combined with DSP*.

The Symbiotic Relationship Between DSP and Corequisites at RIC

At RIC, the simultaneous introduction of DSP and a corequisite course has helped foster the very "creative and effective course structure alternatives" to which Lalicker alludes. But though Lalicker seems to suggest a kind of linear trajectory in his discussion of DSP and corequisites—first the implementation of DSP, then the creation of corequisite options—such was not the case at our institution. The near-simultaneous piloting of DSP and our corequisite course meant that each changed the other: how DSP is enacted depends on the courses, corequisites included, that the FYW Program offers; how those courses evolve and serve is dependent upon how moderators and documents alike frame them in DSP sessions at Orientation as well as each student's rationale for selecting a course. My colleagues and I have created the spectrum of courses that our community of faculty, staff, students, and administrators felt were necessary, and we invite students to choose among those courses. We see the scaffolding of agency at two points of contact—choice among courses, choice of courses—to be critical to the philosophy of student empowerment embraced by both DSP and corequisites. For those Writing Program Administrators (WPAs) who advocate such a philosophy,

it seems that RIC's story is particularly relevant, though not perfect. When *all* students get to choose *any* course, the tracking, sorting, and stigma often associated with more traditional placement methods (writing placement exams, standardized tests) and more traditional course trajectories (basic writing-to-mainstream course) begin to fade.

RIC offers four courses under the FYW Program umbrella; Table 1 articulates some distinguishing features among the choices (more on how the Program describes the courses to students, below) and might prove a helpful referent as readers progress through the descriptions.

Table 1. Courses under the FYW Program Umbrella

Name of Course	# of Credits	Do all credits "count" towards graduation totals?
FYW 010: College Writing Strategies	4	No; none count
FYW 100: Introduction to Academic Writing	4	Yes
FYW 100P: Introduction to Academic Writing PLUS	6	Yes
FYW 100H: Introduction to Academic Writing Honors	4	Yes

Originally, 100Plus was conceived as a hybrid between what was, at the time, our pre-requisite, pre-credit course, "FYW 010: College Writing Strategies" (formerly ENGL 010), and our traditional, long-standing credit-bearing course, "FYW 100: Introduction to Academic Writing." Students who enroll in our pre-credit course, FYW 010 (graded on a pass/fail basis), still must continue on to FYW 100, 100Plus, or 100Honors and successfully complete one of those courses with a grade of "C" or higher in order to fulfill our College Writing Requirement. It was clear to me the first few times

I taught FYW 010—prior to the piloting of FYW 100Plus—that there were students enrolled who did not "need" the two-semester sequence of FYW 010/FYW 100 but who might struggle if placed directly in the credit-bearing, four-credit course, FYW 100. (In the early stages of the DSP pilot, which began in 2012, students were still being placed, for all intents and purposes, by SAT/ACT scores and, for students below the cutoff scores, by a Writing Placement Exam. See Caouette and Griggs for a discussion of the early phases of our multi-year DSP pilot.) FYW 100Plus was piloted as a mashup of FYW 010 and FYW 100, but I somehow—through a combination of the trust of administrators, the support of some powerful campus allies, the invocation of existing corequisite research, the courage of several FYW instructors, and the willingness to fail—convinced administration to allow all six 100Plus credits to "count" towards graduation totals. In its original conception, then, 100Plus was a traditional corequisite course, intended to "accelerate" the BW student towards graduation by requiring fewer semesters of first-year writing instruction even as it was unlike other corequisite courses in its offering of full college credit. This latter point, combined with DSP, significantly affected how the course evolved.

Combining DSP and Corequisites: Institutional Implications

It would be disingenuous of me not to acknowledge the effect of granting full credit for FYW 100Plus. The concept of granting credit for "remedial" writing courses has long been an area of advocacy for Writing Program Administrators (WPAs). WPAs can attest to the powerful effects and ethical necessity of offering credit for all writing classes, regardless of student preparedness at each level (most notably for our purposes, see Glau's discussion of the "stretch" model; see also Mary Soliday's oft-cited discussion of mainstreaming). Indeed, current corequisite models are modern-day solutions to a problem that has existed almost since the inception of the first-year writing requirement: how to award students credit for college-level work—work done *in college*—when the institution does not believe the work to be truly "college-level." And yet, absent the awarding of full credit, corequisites risk perpetuating the same stigma that BW students have long faced: students who need more resources (of time, of space, of instruction) must sacrifice institutional capital in order to move forward. Institutions and now, increasingly, state legislators have weighed in (and legislated) with policies concerning the presence and legitimacy of "remedial" courses at the post-secondary level. While a comprehensive review of this national movement

is beyond the scope of my article, and RIC was not legislatively compelled to scale down its "remedial" curriculum, offering FYW 100Plus as a six-credit, entirely credit-bearing course reflects programmatic, institutional, and legislative awareness of the problems associated with and caused by *requiring* non-credit "remedial" coursework.

Such conversations about the ethics of required non-credit-bearing remedial courses motivated me to reimagine first-year placement and curriculum; the subsequent adoption of the FYW 100Plus course *and* implementation of DSP significantly altered RIC's understanding of the spectrum of available writing courses, new and old. At RIC, 100Plus has become "just another" FYW course in which students could enroll. No one is asked to do additional work without commensurate compensation—not students, not faculty. I recognized that the awarding of graduation credit conveys institutional legitimacy for faculty, students, parents, and administrators; that message had a significant role in shaping how I presented FYW 100Plus—and how stakeholders responded to the course. Consequently, my original concept of 100Plus as FYW 010 and FYW 100 blended together in a binary soup was replaced with the concept of 100Plus as its own course, as a different route to the same outcomes.

The presence of our corequisite course tells only part of the story. Without DSP and the opportunity to *choose* 100Plus (or not), the six-credit FYW course might have proven onerous to students had they been compelled by more traditional placement methods (writing placement exam, standardized test scores, etc.) to enroll in the course; indeed, given our student population's work and home responsibilities, the one-semester six-credit FYW 100Plus course (which meets three days a week) might have been perceived as more of a "punishment" for underprepared writers than a two-semester BW/mainstream sequence. In the absence of DSP, students placed by others into 100Plus would have clearly been signaled as "not ready" (or—worse—"not good enough") for FYW 100. The presence of DSP short-circuited that resentment—no one was obligated to enroll in 100Plus. But *anyone* might: in the fall 2018 semester, over 11% of first-year writing students chose FYW 100Plus.

In giving students a choice *among* courses and a choice *of* courses, the FYW Program created an opportunity for sincere inquiry into how students sequence themselves in and out of first-year writing. This profoundly affects how the Program describes, populates, advertises, and teaches *all of its courses*, as the discussion below will illustrate. In fact, I will go so far as to say that there is the potential to destigmatize BW at Rhode Island College.

Instead, students can choose to fulfill their College Writing Requirement six different ways:

- a two-semester sequence of ten credits: FYW 010 and FYW 100Plus
- a two-semester sequence of eight credits: FYW 010 and FYW 100
- a two-semester sequence of eight credits: FYW 010 and FYW 100Honors
- one semester of six credits: FYW 100Plus
- one semester of four credits: FYW 100
- one semester of four credits: FYW 100Honors

I am convinced that this would not have been possible without both 100Plus and DSP, together. Because of DSP, the FYW Program at RIC has worked hard to disrupt the role of gatekeepers (see Shor) for its students. No one course need be privileged over another; no one path is preferred on the journey to meeting the College Writing Requirement.

Whether one sees these dual-pilot beginnings as steeped in naiveté and inexperience, as clear evidence of a lack of forethought, or as brilliance in disguise, the absence of strict guidelines, rules, or expectations was in many ways liberating for FYW faculty and administrators. Participants saw these two initiatives as "pilots" in the most non-binding way. If the DSP pilot proved unsuccessful, the Program would return to its previous placement method. If the 100Plus pilot proved unsuccessful, the Program would just stop running the course; in the pilot phase, 100Plus was not a permanent part of the curriculum. The risks and inconvenience were minimal, the rewards potentially significant. My goal was to explore any ways I could improve our FYW Program so as to better serve RIC students.

Perhaps the most important implication is that these two initiatives have disrupted efforts to sort students based on institutional-centered criteria (i.e., the aforementioned cutoff scores for SATs and the required Writing Placement Exam), which often left students—particularly those placed in FYW 010—feeling excluded from the process; the criteria now originate with the students themselves, since they choose any of our four courses and six combination options based on their own reasoning. Less relevant than who enrolls in which course are the reasons *why* students make their choices. A student who is concerned about elevating their GPA to meet the admission criteria for a competitive program might appreciate the additional opportunities that a six-credit course would yield (again, see Chemishanova and Snead for an example of unanticipated student populations in their *PlusOne*

program). A student who was home-schooled or a returning student who is uncertain of their ability to adapt to a traditional classroom setting might opt for a two-semester sequence as a means of institutional integration. A student who seeks a more challenging curriculum could express interest in the Honors Program and FYW 100Honors. I can't imagine a "wrong" reason for students to be in any one FYW course. When I am asked "What kind of student enrolls in FYW 010/100/P/H?", one response to the query is "all sorts of students." Quite possibly the more compelling answer is: "Anyone who wants to."

Effects on Program- and College-Wide Investment in Writing Instruction. In spring of 2017 DSP officially was adopted as RIC's FYW placement method; FYW 100Plus was signed into curriculum in spring 2014 and moved out of the pilot phase for fall 2014. Because the pilot beginnings were near-simultaneous, it has been difficult to measure either pilot's success in calculable ways; this is complicated by the fact that the college has renewed its commitment to "student success" (with focus on the first-year experience) in recent years, making it difficult to determine beyond fairly robust FYW 100Plus enrollment, particularly in the fall, what precise factors influence metrics such as retention, persistence, grades, graduation rates, and pass rates in WID courses.

Still, there are a number of early indications that these two pilots have contributed positively to student experiences. The FYW Program now has access to incoming students at every Orientation session; put another way, the FYW Program is a part of a student's earliest introductions to Rhode Island College. My colleagues and I have been given space, time, and resources to talk about placement and about the differences among our four courses, including the prerequisite; previously, students only heard about FYW through a mass mailing and, for many, the Writing Placement Exam proctored *before* Orientation (students were notified via mail of exam scores; our enrollment software blocked students from enrolling in any course outside those determined by the exam). I have met with Orientation leadership and staff to share ideas and collaborate on how best to serve students in the FYW Program. Students, faculty, and staff are *talking about writing* at Orientation—about the FYW courses, about student preparedness, and about what it means to write at RIC. These conversations begin at a student's Orientation and progress through the first week of the chosen FYW course; they then continue for every semester a student is enrolled in a FYW course. Like others who have adopted DSP (again, see Royer and Gilles *Principles and Practices*), I appreciate this opportunity to be part of the college conversation. And,

like those who have instituted corequisites, I appreciate the opportunity to disrupt the easy sorting of students into binaries (BW or mainstream) and prefer, instead, to have a conversation with them.

In addition, all instructors in the FYW Program are now part of the DSP process. Previous to DSP, a handful of FYW instructors would meet to read and score the Writing Placement Exams. This rendered the placement process largely invisible to most FYW faculty. Now, each instructor is asked to review the DSP process, including course descriptions, with students. While the assignment of writing samples early on in the semester was not uncommon among some RIC instructors, I have codified the practice and tied such assignments to the placement method; thus, students and instructors can continue the placement conversation begun during Orientation. Instructors can start the semester knowing why students chose the course they did—their histories, their aspirations, and their concerns. And students can have a better sense of instructor expectations.

Finally, I am confident in my decision to make student choice a cornerstone of the FYW programmatic philosophy. As a WPA, I will say that adopting these two initiatives has affected how I frame other positions and decisions at RIC. I have also found myself more vocal about policies that seem to remove, silence, or discourage student voices and input. In essence, by thinking about student agency in these two initiatives, I've become more attuned to other possible avenues for integrating student choice.

Effects on Scheduling and Registration. I am pleased with the accomplishments attributed to these pilots (both the imagined and unanticipated), but there continue to be administrative challenges that will be familiar to readers who have adopted DSP or corequisite models and which, again, are articulated in the respective literature on DSP and corequisites. I would argue, however, that familiar WPA tasks such as scheduling and registration are uniquely complicated in programs that have adopted both initiatives; indeed, the interdependence of DSP and corequisites have only compounded these challenges at RIC.

Scheduling continues to vex me; I adjust the number and kinds of course offerings based on past patterns and try to respond to demand with staffing, scheduling, and space. I work hard to make sure that there are "enough" sections of each course to meet needs. I have had to phase out FYW 010 in the spring semester because of low enrollment, and the fall 2018 numbers were low, too (see below). Students who genuinely want that course might be at a disservice, and I am working to find solutions. I also worry that students who feel compelled to enroll in FYW their fall semester—despite

reminders that FYW must be taken the first *year*, not necessarily the first semester—might choose any open seat in any of the four courses instead of waiting for a seat in the most appropriate course, even if that means waiting until spring.

Students who enter in the fall but register for spring FYW courses are rather far away from the sunny May and June days of their New Student Orientation—registration for spring courses begins in late October and carries through the beginning of the spring semester. It's possible that students have forgotten their DSP session, details about choosing a FYW course, or even the distinction among the four courses. Moreover, it's possible that the course they chose during Orientation no longer best meets their needs after a semester of college. Perhaps the student realizes that they are more underprepared for college writing than they initially thought; perhaps they realize just the opposite. For me, asking students to revisit or recall their DSP process prior to spring registration seems a solution in line with the Program's placement philosophy, and I am working with student services to better communicate with spring FYW students in this way.

Effects on FYW 010. Not entirely surprisingly, and as alluded to above, the number of FYW 010 sections offered annually has decreased—due to the option of FYW 100Plus, due to DSP as a placement method and, more recently, due to the offer of free tuition (with some restrictions) for two years at our state's community college. I don't necessarily see this as problematic; it's possible that students find what they need in the other three FYW course offerings (or at the community college). The adoption of both DSP and FYW 100Plus has led to a reexamination of *all the courses* under the FYW umbrella (more on FYW 100Honors, for example, below). Whereas I perhaps had been content to retain FYW 010 without question and as inevitable, the two initiatives have given me the confidence to reflect on the course and consider other models (including corequisites) that might serve this small but crucial self-selected FYW 010 population—after all, given other choices, some students still choose FYW 010, and I want to honor that group. Given the low enrollment in fall of 2018 (just nine students total over three sections), my colleagues and I are currently developing a proposal for a new course to replace FYW 010. The dean, who is committed to serving students who choose FYW 010, is open to the discussion.

While FYW 010 as a pre-credit, pre-requisite model might be eventually phased out, a new model may replace it. This new model might also be credit-bearing, and/or it might attract unanticipated populations, and/or it might serve the needs of students who feel as if there are no "best choices"

for them in the four courses now offered. The current enrollment decline of FYW 010 is an opportunity to reevaluate how the Program is or is not serving the needs of its students: do students generally feel that the FYW 010 does not meet their needs? Are there institutional factors such as credit load or scheduling patterns that heavily influence student decisions to opt in or out of FYW 010? Or are the numbers, however small, accurate in representing the students who truly find that FYW 010 is the best choice for them? I hope that more research, both from my own institution and others, will be forthcoming in identifying the spectrum of FYW courses that best meet student needs at the local level.

Indeed, perhaps one of the most unforeseen implications of these two pilots is that it has made my FYW colleagues and me bold in our experimentations; our program has modeled for the college the possibilities of significant curricular change at the first-year level. I don't want to suggest the FYW Program broke all the rules in creating 100Plus and offering DSP, but what I realized is that there weren't as many rules as I thought. Policies constraining adjunct faculty workloads, course credits, remedial coursework, and schedules were sometimes negotiated or, at the very least, clarified when questioned. While revisions to FYW 010 were not part of either the DSP or the FYW 100Plus pilots (we expected that 010 would co-exist), the effects of those intersecting pilots have caused a ripple throughout the program and have fundamentally changed how the program approaches revisions to curriculum and placement; in the final pages of this article, I discuss how that has also encouraged the FYW Program to think in terms of agency for all students—even those we don't generally consider when we talk about placement and corequisites.

Effects on Universal Access to Choice—All Students, All Courses. Because of our visible presence at Orientation, I am confident that most RIC students participate in DSP. The FYW Program continues to work with student services and Orientation organizers to find systematic ways to identify students who fall through the cracks—those who don't attend Orientation or who enroll late, for example. These students often choose courses "on the fly" or rely on under-informed advisors or peers to make decisions. Such students may not know that RIC offers four different courses, nor might they know where to access descriptions of those courses. I am fortunate that the student services office has been a key supporter and source of information throughout these pilots. I am optimistic that changes in institutional leadership and a renewed focus on long-overdue technological[2] improvements at RIC will help better serve *all* students.

Moreover, even those students determined to be more "proficient" writers might be unintentionally excluded from the DSP process and subliminally discouraged from selecting courses that might better speak to their academic needs. One such group consists of students who transfer in FYW credit from other institutions; another is those students who transfer in standardized test credit (like CLEP or AP). Our institution does offer Transfer and New Student Orientations in January. And in all our DSP sessions and handouts, moderators provide information on some of the more common pathways for the transfer of first-year writing credit into RIC. The benefits of, drawbacks to, and complications (to students, to courses, to programs, to institutions) in awarding transfer credit is a larger national conversation (for a comprehensive treatment of dual credit and concurrent enrollment programs, see Hansen and Farris's edited collection). My point here is that students who transfer in credit might benefit from additional writing instruction but might not participate—either by choice or because of the absence of inclusive rhetoric—in DSP. Therefore, they might not take note of a beneficial FYW course. I have had students with transfer credit from AP exams express real interest in FYW 100Plus. While I still ask all students to participate in the DSP process regardless of what they bring to RIC (that is, all students at New Student Orientation attend the DSP session even if, for example, they bring in AP credit), how seriously they do so is hard to gauge. As the Program revises its DSP questionnaire (see below), I seek to be more inclusive of this population of students even as I anticipate that many students with transfer FYW credit will not opt to enroll in one of RIC's FYW courses. The point here is to offer them the choice.

Then, too, those students admitted into the College Honors Program generally enroll in Honors-designated FYW[3]. These students meet with the Director of the Honors Program for targeted advising during Orientation. Requirements for receiving "College Honors" upon graduation include completion of five General Education Honors-designated courses. FYW 100Honors is one of the most convenient courses to help fulfill that requirement, and many students in the Honors Program may take that course instead of considering other FYW options via invested participation in DSP. However, just as with students who transfer in FYW credit, Honors students in effect are excluded from the DSP process. For several cycles of New Student Orientation, the FYW 100Honors checkbox on our DSP handout has been a default option for Honors students, a kind of afterthought: if you're in the Honors Program or are interested in enrolling in the Honors Program, take this course. Truly, that has been the extent of the "description" of the course.

Last year, however, my colleagues and I revised the DSP Questionnaire largely due to concerns regarding validity (see Ruggles Gere et al.). As the FYW Program's placement process and courses have evolved, and as that same program has adopted revised outcomes, I have come to realize that the previous questionnaire no longer reflects the kinds of FYW courses offered at RIC. In the revision, my colleagues and I sought to posit the FYW 100Honors course as a *choice*, just as the three other FYW courses are posited as such. We described the features that make the course unique among the four, and in this way, we created a course option for students who might seek a more challenging first-year writing experience. And, because the Honors Program sees FYW 100Honors not only as a course for Honors students but also as a potential recruitment space for those students who are interested in Honors and/or a more challenging curriculum, the course can become a choice for all students—not just those in the Honors Program. I anticipated none of this when I embarked on these dual pilots, but I am pleased with the way in which the pilots have revealed yet another population of students whom the FYW Program might better serve.

Indeed, such opportunities continue to reveal themselves. For illustrative purposes, I've included our (clearly outdated) course descriptions in the Appendix to show how exclusionary rhetoric can permeate multiple layers of a writing program. The moderators did not use these descriptions at this year's Orientation DSP session but, though the document's revision is on my to-do list, it still resides on the FYW Program website. In the appended document, it's clear that I am establishing FYW 100 as the default or "mainstream" course and comparing the other three courses in relation to it. While I offer the most sections of FYW 100, and that course is chosen by the vast majority of our incoming students, the representation of FYW 100 as default completely undermines the purpose of DSP sessions and corequisite models with rhetoric that subverts choice, however subliminally. This is a particularly glaring oversight in that over 18% of fall 2018 first-year students *did not* choose FYW 100 (1.5% enrolled in FYW 010; 11.5% enrolled in FYW 100Plus; and more than 5% enrolled in FYW 100Honors). This is yet another example as to how these two initiatives have changed, and continue to change, the way I think about placement, the curriculum, and student agency.

Conclusion

It is the policy of the FYW Program at RIC to invite *all* students to participate in DSP as a means to locate the course or sequence of courses,

including corequisites, which each student believes will best serve them. The FYW Program's policy implementation is not perfect and, despite the post-pilot status, I continue to identify areas of inconsistent messaging, poor delivery, and programmatic interference with student choice. The FYW Program also sees further opportunities to refine its DSP process and to consider other FYW courses that students might need at the pre-credit, corequisite, "mainstream," or Honors level. For example, I seek to collaborate more meaningfully with RIC's multilingual (L2) programs; I think it's a real possibility that some students might choose L2-specific sections of FYW (see, for example, Ruecker).

I believe my colleagues and I have created an important precedent for innovation and choice in our program and at our institution, but I acknowledge that there is still a great deal of work to be done. I recognize the need for further local and generalizable research on this approach. (Despite the tongue-in-cheek beginning of this article, my colleagues and I do work to create thoughtful, responsive programmatic assessment). In the end, while the past twenty years have produced a growing corpus of research and scholarship on DSP and corequisites *separately*, the same cannot be said of investigations into the marrying of these two initiatives. The need for further research seems particularly timely as colleges and universities expand corequisite offerings and consider DSP and other choice-based placement methods.

Our aspirations for student agency find inspiration in Ritter's pivotal monograph on BW at Yale and Harvard; in her final pages she writes,

> Imagine, if you will, a first-year program at Equitable University that looks like this: A first-year writing curriculum with a menu of course options for incoming (and transfer) students, each with equal course credit, each with a small course capacity... and each with a simple, objective name. . . . Each course is regarded publicly. . . as college-level, and incoming students are encouraged to choose, through a process of guided self-placement, which course along the sequence best meets their initial needs. No student is called remedial or basic and certainly not precollege (they *have* been admitted, after all, to the university). (Ritter 140-41; emphasis in original)

I'll not pretend that the FYW Program at RIC has achieved this ideal in the destigmatizing of BW students simply by offering corequisites, or that the placement method is transparent in its invitation to all students; the preced-

ing pages make clear that RIC has yet to achieve that goal. But like Ritter, I imagine such a place as Equitable University, and I believe that the work done at Rhode Island College to honor student choice in writing placement is a step towards making the imaginary a reality.

Notes

1. Here I draw upon a long scholarly tradition concerning the role of BW courses and the stigma of remediation in the post-secondary classroom; in particular, I wish to acknowledge my debt to robust conversations marking the end of the previous century and the beginning of this one. The citations are too numerous to list here (though several cited from *JBW* show this journal's key influence), but I hope their impact on our programmatic goals—to support, welcome, and validate all writers—can be seen in the pages of this article.

2. While RIC has a dedicated group of administrators and staff in the technological support systems, that area of the college has been under-resourced in the past. Recently, the FYW Program moved to an online process for our DSP sessions. However, the program used is not adopted by the whole college (Web Services knew about the program; User Support Services did not). Still, an online form is a step in the right direction; in the future, students, support services, and faculty advisors might access evidence of student DSP choices, prompt students with timely reminders, and even block FYW enrollment until DSP questionnaires are completed. Those students seeking to enroll in the spring semester might be asked over intersession to revisit their DSP choices. I acknowledge that the technological difficulties seem in some ways archaic, but nevertheless, in this institutional context, they are very real. And I see these not as difficulties with RIC's placement method but rather with the delivery, though I recognize the two are linked.

3. Many thanks to Moira Collins, former FYW Program adjunct faculty member, for noting this disservice to Honors students early on in our DSP pilot process.

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APPENDIX

Below are the descriptions of FYW courses previously included in RIC's DSP packet; see discussion, above, about how DSP and FYW 100Plus have inspired the FYW Program to rethink how it describes these courses in relation to each other.

- **FYW 010: College Writing Strategies** *(formerly* ENGL 010: Basic Writing)

FYW 010: College Writing Strategies is a writing course designed for students who are not yet ready to take FYW 100 or FYW 100P and who may need a little more time to write as well as more individualized feedback on their writing. Students are required to meet with a Writing Center tutor at least three times over the course of the semester. Students who successfully complete FYW 010 will enroll in FYW 100 the following semester; FYW 010 alone does not meet the College Writing Requirement. While FYW 010 is a four-credit course, those credit hours do not count towards graduation or towards a student's GPA; they do count towards a student's full-time status. The course is graded on a Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U) grading scale. Enrollment is capped at 10 students.

- **FYW 100P: Introduction to Academic Writing PLUS**

FYW 100P: Introduction to Academic Writing Plus is a writing course designed for students who are not yet ready for the demands of FYW 100 but who feel that they might not need two semesters of first-year writing instruction (as the FYW 010/FYW 100 sequence would provide). Students who successfully earn a grade of "C" or higher in FYW 100P have completed the College Writing Requirement (please note that there may be other requirements based on intended majors; check with your advisor for more details). FYW 100P meets the same outcomes as FYW 100 (below), but allows students a bit more time and interaction with their instructor. Approximately one meeting day per week will be spent in a computer classroom and with a Writing Center tutor. FYW 100P is a six-credit course that meets three times a week; it is graded on a traditional (4.0) scale. Enrollment is capped at 15 students.

- **FYW 100: Introduction to Academic Writing** (formerly WRTG 100)

FYW 100, Introduction to Academic Writing, is a writing course that introduces students to the conventions and expectations of academic writing—that is, the kinds of writing they will be expected to do in college as well as in their subsequent careers (and lives). Students who successfully complete FYW 100 with a grade of "C" or higher have completed the College Writing Requirement (please note that there may be other requirements based on intended majors; check with your advisor for more details). FYW 100 is a four-credit course that is graded on a traditional (4.0) grading scale. Enrollment is capped at 20 students.

- **FYW 100H: Introduction to Academic Writing HONORS**

This course is a FYW course specifically designed for students in the Honors Program. For questions about the program, please contact Dr. Rebecca Sparks, Director, at rsparks@ric.edu.