

## English Department Proposal to Change the Final Exam Schedule

Submitted by Dr. Lauren Ingraham, Director of Composition

This recommendation was passed unanimously by the English department on January 22, 2008, after a unanimous endorsement from its Composition Committee.

### Proposal

**We request that final exams for all day sections of all freshman composition courses (English 106, 121, 122, 161, and 162) be given during the time currently designated for the day sections of English 121: 2:00-4:00 pm on the first full day of exams in each fall and spring semester.** Evening sections of all freshman composition sections, as well as summer classes, would continue to give exams according to the current exam schedule. Effective date: December 2008 or as soon as possible.

### Background

Currently all day sections of English 121 are scheduled to give exams on the first day of the exam period from 2:00-4:00 pm. This practice has been in place for over a decade for reasons unknown to any current members of the English department. We hope to take advantage of the existing schedule and move the remaining freshman composition sections to the same time period.

### Why, and Why Now?

Final exams for freshman composition courses include a substantial writing component. As our faculty has evolved from primarily part-time instructors teaching only one or two writing classes to full-time lecturers teaching four or five writing classes each, the grading load for each teacher has increased dramatically. With 20 students enrolled in most of our writing courses, an instructor faces the prospect of reading 100 essay exams during finals, in addition to grading each student's final writing portfolio, a collection of three or more polished essays plus rough draft material. To provide sufficient time to carefully evaluate this student writing, all exams should be scheduled as early as possible in our final exam schedule. The easiest way to accomplish this feat without disrupting the entire schedule is to schedule all freshman composition exams during the time currently scheduled for English 121 exams.

Further, all English 106 final exams serve as placement exams. They are scored by two readers other than the student's teacher, and only those students who pass the final exam may progress to English 121. To facilitate this group scoring of exams, we have been getting permission to schedule the English 106 exams with the English 121 exams for the last few semesters. Having the English 106 exams officially scheduled on that first day of exams would recognize the process we currently use without the need to get permission to move the exams each semester.

Before the current student information system was introduced, we had to rely on luck and our eagle eyes to spot students who enrolled in more than one composition course at a time, in violation of the requirement to take the courses in sequence. As a result, at least a handful of students managed to enroll in two composition classes simultaneously each semester. In the

past, these students would not have been able to sit for exams in two courses at the same time. Now, however, computer-assisted scans of course rolls assure that students may be registered for only one composition course at a time. Scheduling all composition course exams in the same exam period would no longer create a conflict for any of our students.

Finally, changes in the assessment climate suggest that in the near future we may need to require an identical (or nearly identical) final exam and/or writing portfolio of all sections of the freshman composition courses to satisfy accountability demands. Having the exams scheduled at the same time will simplify this process.

### Human Impact

We anticipate that this change would have no adverse impact on students and would offer several benefits to faculty. Because students may enroll in only one freshman composition course at a time, this change would maintain the current practice of requiring students to sit for only one exam at a time. The benefits for faculty, however, are numerous. Most notably, all exams could be universally substantial and rigorous, and instructors would be able to offer identical exams to multiple sections because all students would see the exam at the same time.

### Impact on Facilities

We currently schedule up to five 22-person sections in a single room during the ENGL 121 final exam period. Finding sufficiently large rooms for all composition students of each teacher should not be a problem if no other exams are scheduled during that time period.

Thank you for considering our proposal. I'm happy to answer any questions you have about the request.