Academic Audit Self-Study
Academic Area: English
Motlow State Community College
Fall 2013/Spring 2014

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1. Introduction

The English Discipline is part of the Languages Department and functions under the leadership of the Languages Department Chair. The Discipline employs 12 full-time faculty members and approximately 40 part-time faculty members.

In keeping with the establishment of The Tennessee Board of Regent’s General Education core in 2002, Motlow’s English Discipline offers the following courses via a variety of delivery methods including traditional on-ground courses, online courses, hybrid courses that blend on-ground and online elements, evening courses, Accelerated Learning courses, and dual enrollment courses at area high schools:

- ENGL 0810 Learning Support Writing
- ENGL 1010 Freshman Composition I
- ENGL 1020 Freshman Composition II
- ENGL 2130 Survey of American Literature
- ENGL 2230 Survey of British Literature
- ENGL 2330 Survey of World Literature
- ENGL 2310 World Literature I
- ENGL 2320 World Literature II

Because our Learning Support curriculum is currently under review as part of our proposal to embed Learning Support students into college-level courses, ENGL 0810 will not be discussed in this study and will instead be part of a Learning Support self-study in the future (See Appendix A).

During the period of this study (Fall 2012 – Spring 2013), 260 sections of ENGL courses were taught (excluding RODP), 141 by full-time faculty and 119 by adjunct faculty. 31 sections were taught as online courses.

Additionally, the English Program is a central part of Motlow’s Honors Program and offers Honors sections of the courses above. Many of these special Honors sections are designed around specific themes for inquiry and research such as Greek Mythology, Anime Studies, Southern Literature, Popular Culture, Tolkien, Science Fiction, and Film Studies.

Also during the period of this study, the English Discipline taught 36 sections of English courses in 12 different area high schools to a duplicate headcount total of 628 students. Through these courses, high school students were able to satisfy high school graduation requirements while simultaneously acquiring college credits.

Motlow students may choose to major in English as part of the Tennessee Transfer Pathway Associate of Arts degree, English Area of Emphasis. However, only four students graduated with this major in the past year. Instead, the discipline primarily services non-English majors through the Associate of Science University Parallel degree in the General Studies Area.
of Emphasis or as part of the General Education Core requirements for a variety of more specific majors. The majority of Motlow students are required to complete ENGL 1010 Freshman Composition I, ENGL 1020 Freshman Composition II, and at least one sophomore literature course. See Appendix B for a list of English courses offered and the number of students who registered for the courses during the time of this self-study.

This study was informally begun in the Fall of 2012 and did not become a formal TBR self-study until late September of 2013 when the English department was asked to complete this study as part of Motlow’s THEC Performance Funding requirements. Originally, Motlow was scheduled to engage in a self-study of the University Parallel Program, which would have been only the fourth self-study by a Motlow program since 2006. Due to extensive turnover in academic leadership, Motlow was not prepared to complete the University Parallel Program self-study and was given permission by THEC on Sept. 18 to switch to two smaller self-studies (this one of the English Program and one of the Psychology Program) that would be due Feb 1.

The English Program was chosen to complete this self-study on such short notice because we were already in the midst of a major review of curriculum and were using the TBR’s handbook for academic audits as our guide. In the Fall of 2012, the English Discipline began a self-initiated review of itself after the results of the General Education assessment for Freshman Composition I showed a dramatic fall-off from previous semesters. In order to discover how our assessment results had fallen so precipitously, the department formed a sub-committee that eventually looked at various data, best practices from other institutions, assessment models/procedures, textbooks, etc. The results of this inquiry were surprising. We discovered that after having undergone several changes in leadership at the level of Department Chair, Dean of Humanities, Assistant Vice President of Academic Affairs, and Vice President of Academic Affairs, we had lost much of the explanation of our basic procedures. We were just going through the motions as a discipline in many ways.

Consequently, it was decided that we would “start over” as a discipline and would use TBR’s Educational Quality Improvement: A Handbook for the Academic Audit as our guide. We started from scratch by creating new Student Learning Outcomes (SLO’s) for our courses and then chose new textbooks, wrote a new catalog description for a Composition course, created new assessment tools and procedures, and designed a new means of communicating all these changes to our adjunct faculty. The steps taken to improve the quality of instruction since Spring of 2013 form the basis of this self-study and will be discussed in detail under the Focal Area discussions that follow.

As stated earlier, the English Discipline had started their own informal self-study just months earlier, and in order to proceed more formally, we immediately held an academic audit workshop to begin work on the formal self-study. All of the Discipline’s full-time faculty attended as well as two adjunct faculty members (See Appendix C).

From that point on, the work of the self-study was carried out more informally via email discussions and/or small group meetings with the Languages Department Chair.
2. Overall Performance

As was mentioned above and as will be explained in greater detail below, the English Discipline had not undergone a thorough review in anyone’s memory. Frankly, we had been following the same learning and teaching practices and methodologies for decades. Much of what we did in the classroom was based on what we had learned in graduate school in the 1980’s, and if full or part-time faculty whose graduate experience conflicted with our traditional methodologies came along, accommodations were made to allow them to teach differently.

It was not until the experiences of this self-study that the English Discipline began to examine our own practices more formally and thoroughly in terms of other institutions and professional organizations. As is evident in the rest of this study, the results have been dramatic. But regardless of our previous practices, the English Discipline is on sound footing now and can say with certainty that our curriculum is well-designed, our methods are based on best practices, and student performance is commendable.

There are significant challenges at Motlow that influence the Discipline’s ability to run effectively:

- Full and part-time faculty are spread over four campuses and eleven counties (See Appendix D).

- The applicant pool for qualified part-time English faculty is extremely small, and the Discipline is often left trying to “coach-up” poorly performing adjuncts rather than replace them.

- The majority of full-time faculty are unfamiliar with contemporary best practices such as the use of outcomes and assessment, the use of rubrics, and even the basic concept of continuous improvement and quality assurance.

And yet, the scores on our ETS Exam (an exam all graduating students must take) suggest that Motlow students perform at or above the national mean in Critical Thinking, Reading, Writing, and Humanities (See Appendix E).

As a result of the experiences provided by this self-study, we are better able to point to a number of indicators of educational quality processes. For example, we now have in place clear Program Outcomes for the English Program that are presented to students and part-time faculty on our standardized syllabi and on the Languages Department’s web page (See Appendix F). We also have clear and measurable Student Learning Outcomes for all English courses as well as clear Course Objectives that are also presented to students and part-time faculty on our standardized syllabi and on the Languages Department’s web page. Additionally, we have created an English Faculty Handbook that contains all information pertinent to teaching any English course at Motlow, and after the implementation of this handbook in Fall of
2013, we are confident that our part-time faculty understand the procedures associated with our General Education assessments much more clearly (See Appendix G). In fact, the participation rate in the General Education assessments among full and part-time faculty went from 65% in Spring of 2013 before the handbook to 98% after implementation of the handbook in Fall of 2013.

While this study has provided us with the impetus for improvement and while we have instituted many improvements already, the self-study experience has also helped us to target specific weaknesses and to make concrete plans for improvement in the areas of collaboration, implementation of curriculum, and student feedback. We are far more confident in our quality assurance measures now, and we believe the discipline as a whole is committed to continuous improvement in ways that would not have been possible had we not undergone this study.

3. Performance by Focal Area

Focal Area 1: Learning Objectives

During the Fall of 2012, the English Discipline began an informal review of itself after a recent assessment of Freshman Composition I showed a dramatic drop in scores. The initial explanation for the drop in scores was that there was no consensus among faculty members (both full and part-time) regarding standards for written assignments. The thinking was that students weren’t being held to high standards consistently across all sections of English courses; therefore, their performance on the General Education Assessment assignment was predictably weak.

A sub-committee was formed to revise the Discipline’s “Guidelines for Written Assignments,” which was primarily a collection of point deductions faculty were expected to enforce when grading written assignments and which had been in place largely unchanged for decades (See Appendix H).

As that sub-committee’s work progressed, we discovered that after the advent of the Compete College Act of 2010, many basic components needed for a sound department were missing. The faculty had Student Learning Outcomes for its classes, but most faculty were completely unaware of these and were not designing class assignments around them. The SLO’s didn’t even appear on the course syllabi. Moreover, we had not looked at our textbooks, catalog descriptions, assignments, etc., for years, and we had never had in place a real set of best practices. Nor did we have in place a means of communicating Student Learning Outcomes, General Education assessment assignments, best practices, etc. to the part-time faculty who teach roughly 50% of our courses and who are spread over four campuses.

The end result of that sub-committee’s work was a complete revision of much of the apparatus associated with teaching English at Motlow. In April of 2013, the English Discipline adopted new SLO’s, new textbooks, new General Education assessment assignments and
procedures, and new methods for communicating all of these to part-time faculty (our English Faculty Handbook, available in Appendix G).

Because the Faculty were still so new to the idea of faculty-wide SLO’s for each class, we did not want to create SLO’s on our own as much as institute outcomes we knew would be clear and measurable—ones that had been created by more experienced professionals. Consequently, the English Discipline’s SLO’s are based on those provided by TBR in 2002. The Freshman Composition I textbook was chosen specifically because it is designed around the “rhetorical situation” approach to Composition pedagogy as opposed to the “rhetorical modes” approach of our previous text, which had been in place for over a decade and which posed significant problems in terms of the new SLO’s. With quality assurance in mind, the faculty feel the text will help students as well as part-time faculty who have less familiarity with writing assignments requiring specific audiences and purposes. For example, our traditional comparison/contrast essay assignment previously had no explanation or guidance regarding what students compared/contrasted, why they were doing it, or for whom. Even the readings in the text often lacked these basic rhetorical features. Instead, the new text helps us discuss audience/purpose in sample essays as well as the students’ own writing. Consequently, we have designed our General Education assessment assignment so that students evaluate conflicting parenting styles for first-time parents. This not only makes it easier to measure the new SLO’s, but it helps us explain why students are writing in the first place. It makes the writing more like real-world writing and less like our traditional English-class writing, which often resembled the traditional, Orwellian “Essay” more than it did the kinds of writing are expected to produce in their other college courses.

The new SLO’s also necessitated a complete revision of our Freshman Composition II class, which was the most difficult and even contentious change we have undergone. Previously, the course was taught as an introduction to the formal aesthetics of fiction, poetry, and drama, and was by far the most popular course for our faculty to teach. But the sub-committee mentioned above quickly learned via informal conversations with both full and part-time faculty that despite the class being intended as a composition class in which students would write about literature, the class was for all intents and purposes a literature class with a composition title. Though students were required to write three short research papers in the class, the vast majority of class discussion involved literary topics not writing instruction and practice. According to our suggested syllabus, of the 1000 possible points students could earn in the course, only 300 concerned writing. The rest came from reading exams and quizzes.

Now, the course is redesigned around the following principles (comprising part of our list of best practices discussed in Focal Area 3), which we believe will lead to the desired student outcomes:

- Skill transfer to other courses and professional settings will be the end goal for all students.
• As much as possible, instructors should rely less on lecturing and more on active learning activities in the course.

• Student writing, whether formal or informal, should make up no less than 70% of the final grade.

• Student writing, especially for formal assignments, should be both purpose and audience-oriented.

• Instructors should provide grading rubrics when major assignments are initially assigned to inform students of the criteria for evaluating the assignment.

These principles/best practices are also in keeping with the current MSCC General Education Program Goals listed in our Catalog:

The objectives of the General Education Program at Motlow are to provide learning experiences which will lead students to

• Read, write, listen, and speak effectively

• Recognize the value of the arts, aesthetics, and their intellectual heritage

• Clarify personal strengths, values, and goals, and evaluate attitudes, values, and ideas in a rational manner

• Develop knowledge and skills which promote life-long learning and productive citizenship

• Think critically and make reasoned choices by acquiring, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating knowledge

• Understand the methods of assimilating information using mathematical, quantitative, and information processing skills

• Acquire an awareness and sensitivity to the effects of science and technology in society

These goals have been in place at Motlow since at least 1997, and are currently being reviewed and revised by our newly created Program Review Committee. The charge of this new committee is to introduce all academic programs to the process of TBR Academic Audits and to provide a fixed schedule for and means of internally auditing each academic department on a continual basis (See Appendix I).
With new SLO’s in place, we were able to choose a more appropriate textbook and design a syllabus around those SLO’s including assignments regarding rhetorical analysis of argumentative essays, evaluation of sources for credibility and authority, and, in general, research and writing that is more applicable to non-English courses such as History, Psychology, Business, etc. A set of best practices for English courses was also developed and will be discussed in more detail in Focal Area 3 below.

The re-establishment of SLO’s for our literature courses involved affirmation more than creation and was therefore an easier task. The SLO’s are meant to assure that students in all literature courses are provided the following basic opportunities:

- To examine literature as art in terms of traditional aesthetics
- To examine literature in terms of cultural diversity
- To examine literature as a product of its time and place
- To examine literature as a source for understanding the contemporary world

Our new literature syllabi provide these opportunities, as does our new assessment instrument, which will be used initially in Spring 2014.

Additionally, our long process of reviewing the English Discipline resulted in the creation of Program Outcomes, something that few disciplines at Motlow currently have, though departments are now creating these in preparation for the 2014 Academic Audit of the University Parallel major. These Program Outcomes (discussed in more detail in Focal Area 2 below) and the new SLO’s for our courses are now part of the standardized syllabi for all English courses.

After the Spring 2014 semester, these new Program and Student Learning Outcomes will have been in place for one academic year. While we already have a means of reviewing assessment results each semester (the Use of Assessment Results reports each academic department must produce annually), we will review the new outcomes at the start of each academic year to generate discussion of measurability, effectiveness, and clarity. Our first opportunity to do this will be Fall 2014.

To continue the work we have done toward improvement, we have also identified the following weaknesses. Initiatives for improvement developed to address these weakness will appear at the end of this study:

1). Communication with adjunct faculty is somewhat ineffective

2). Collaboration within the English Discipline is limited
Focal Area 2: Curriculum and Co-curriculum

At Motlow, all curriculum decisions must be approved by the Academic Affairs Committee, which is chaired by the Vice President for Academic Affairs. Committee members include various directors tangentially involved with academics (such as the Director of Libraries or the Assistant Vice-President of Student Affairs) as well as the following academic members:

Vice-President for Academic Affairs (Chair)
Assistant Vice-President for Academic Affairs
Department Chairs from each academic department
One faculty member from each of the nine academic departments

Degree Requirements and General Education course descriptions approved by the Academic Affairs Committee are in keeping with the Tennessee Board of Regents’ General Education Requirements and Degree Requirements (Policy 2:01:00:00).

Based on information gathered from other institutions such as Middle Tennessee State University and professional organizations such as The Association of American Colleges and Universities and the Council of Writing Program Administrators, the English Discipline has created the following Program Outcomes:

After completing the requirements of the English Program, students will be able to . . .

• Express themselves in writing that demonstrates mastery of the conventions of professional writing including correctness of usage, punctuation, mechanics, and syntax.

• Express themselves in writing that demonstrates attention to rhetorical situation and that achieves intended and specific purposes.

• Gather information from a variety of media sources, evaluate that information in terms of credibility and authority, and incorporate it into writing that demonstrates independent and critical thinking.

• Analyze and evaluate arguments, beliefs, and issues throughout human history in such a way as to become more informed regarding the students’ contemporary world.

• Analyze literary texts as both works of art and products of cultural exchange.

English Courses and Catalog Descriptions are in keeping with TBR’s 2002 Proposal for the Establishment of a Lower Division General Education Core. The Student Learning Outcomes for
all of our composition and literature courses are based on the “General Education Outcomes for Communication” and the “General Education Outcomes for Humanities and/or Fine Arts” listed in the 2002 TBR Proposal. These SLO’s were adopted in Spring of 2013 as part of an informal program review that is discussed in more detail in Focal Area 3 below. The adoption of the new SLO’s was a collaborative effort involving both full and part-time faculty on all four campuses. This collaboration began by asking ourselves exactly what students should be doing in both composition and literature courses. The result was a major revision to our curriculum for both composition courses (See Appendix J).

We have designed the Freshman Composition curriculum so that students in Composition I will be introduced to the idea of writing with a clear purpose to a specific audience. As they work on achieving this outcome, we also help them improve their mastery of surface features: syntax, diction, usage, and mechanics. Near the end of the semester, we expect students to be able to quote, paraphrase, and summarize sources in their writing effectively, and our assessment tool for the course measures each of these outcomes.

Subsequently, students in Freshman Composition II build on Composition I skills by becoming proficient at locating, analyzing, and evaluating sources that are then used in argumentative essays. In designing this new curriculum, we abandoned our earlier practice of using literature in the Composition II course as both resource and subject matter for student essays. After an honest review, the Discipline felt that students were spending a preponderance of course-time acquiring literary-analysis skills that would not be assessed in a composition course and that would not build directly upon the skills acquired in the previous Freshman Composition I course.

In order to communicate Program Outcomes and Student Learning Outcomes to all stakeholders, both sets of outcomes are included prominently on the discipline’s syllabi, a requirement which is part of Motlow’s new Master Syllabus Template initiative. Additionally, our Program Outcomes appear on the Languages’ Department web page and are printed in the English Faculty Handbook, also available on the Language Department’s web page (See Appendix F).

To further communicate and implement our course SLO’s in our Composition courses and to improve consistency of standards and grading, the English Discipline has developed a basic grading-rubric that can be used for major writing assignments without modification, though it can be modified to fit specific assignments by the instructor. The rubric is discussed in more detail in Focal Area 3 below.

Because we have chosen to use TBR's 2002 SLO’s for Communications courses almost verbatim as our SLO’s for Composition courses, our Composition students acquire co-curricular learning outcomes with their Speech 1010 course, a general education requirement for all students. Similarly, our SLO’s for Literature courses are also based on TBR’s SLO’s for Humanities courses, and while students acquire specific skills associated with literary analysis in their literature courses, they also acquire broader understanding of human history and cultural
diversity that is reinforced in many of their other General Education courses. We are now confident that students’ literature courses are not designed to teach them skills associated primarily with English as a discipline, but are instead designed to be co-curricular with History, Psychology, Sociology, Art, Music, etc.

To continue the work we have done toward improvement, we have also identified the following weaknesses. Initiatives for improvement developed to address these weakness will appear at the end of this study:

1). We are not fully capitalizing on the skills and strengths of part-time Faculty

2). Feedback beyond our own faculty is limited

3). Curriculum may be inconsistent across all sections of courses

**Focal Area 3: Teaching and Learning Methods**

As mentioned previously, the English Discipline formed a sub-committee in the Fall of 2012 to review the discipline’s “Guidelines for Written Assignments,” though its work soon grew into a complete review of the English Discipline’s curriculum, outcomes, assessments, and teaching methods. At that time, we discovered that the enormous and constant turn-over in department leadership had resulted in a sort of stagnation in the department. Between 2006 and 2013, the English Discipline had five different chairs. Each new chair spent most of their tenure simply learning the job and keeping the department afloat. Consequently, the discipline had no real discussions regarding program review, much less pedagogy; we simply taught as we always had over and over again.

As this sub-committed began discovering various issues within the discipline that needed addressing, the Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs (through the Vice President of Academic Affairs) afforded one English faculty member release-time for one semester to meet with the English Discipline and propose needed changes. These meetings resulted in a dramatic revision of basic English Discipline philosophy regarding everything from outcomes to grading practices to textbooks to assessments ([See Appendix J](#)).

Regarding new SLO’s, our feeling was that it was best to adopt TBR’s original 2002 SLO’s more or less verbatim to provide the discipline with a starting place. After some experience with these SLO’s, we feel we will be better able to write our own SLO’s if the need arises. Because we felt our existing practice of using the “rhetorical modes” approach to teaching composition would conflict with these new SLO, we choose new composition textbooks that would let us design writing assignments and preparatory discussions around rhetorical situation more clearly.

We also felt that our traditional approach to grading written assignments would need to be revised. Previously, we had used grading as a sort of pedagogical tool: students were
expected to learn what good writing was through the marks and comments we put on their graded assignments (See Appendix H). As we began collaborating more with one another over all four campuses during Spring 2013, and in particular, as we capitalized on the knowledge and experience of our full and part-time faculty who had most recently come from graduate courses in Rhetoric and Composition, we recognized the benefits of creating a standardized grading-rubric to be used in place of our previous “Guidelines for Written Assignments.” Though ours isn’t a true rubric in the sense that it does not contain gradations of descriptions for performance, it does serve as a sort of middle ground between our previous form of grading and the use of grading-rubrics. The new rubric does help alleviate some of the confusion students felt regarding what was expected of them (what essay grades mean), and it does offer us a means of communicating more clearly how students can improve their writing. Our intention is to create a more complete grading-rubric once we have first introduced our part-time faculty specifically to the use of grading-rubrics (See Appendix K).

Also in the Spring of 2013, we recognized the need for a set of best practices that could be used to communicate our new approach to teaching composition courses in particular. In the Fall of 2013, a small group of full and part-time faculty looked at lists of best practices from other institutions and professional organizations and proposed a list of best practices for Motlow. This list was discussed via email with the entire faculty and was formally accepted as the English Discipline’s Best Practices in January of 2014 (See Appendix L). Along with the discipline’s new Program Outcomes, the list of best practices was placed on the Languages Department web page in January of 2014 where it could be easily referenced by full and part-time faculty.

In order to address our lack of communication and collaboration as a discipline, we also decided to create an English Faculty Handbook. Because roughly 50% of our classes are taught by part-time faculty and because these faculty members are stretched across an 11-county service area, it is often the case that the department chair must staff classes with faculty whom s/he has never met and whose teaching methods may be completely unknown to him/her. The English Faculty Handbook, then, is meant to communicate to these part-time faculty members what is expected. Our course syllabi contain the Program Outcomes and SLO’s for the courses, but the Handbook offers our list of best practices, instruction for General Education and QEP assessments, the discipline’s grading rubric, and even meeting minutes, Use of Assessment Results reports, and Institutional Effectiveness reports. The handbook also provides instructions for reporting attendance, recording final grades, processing forms regarding grade changes or topics course proposals, and acts as a resource for frequently asked questions. The handbook is available on the Language Department’s web page (See Appendix F).

Finally, in trying to update our teaching methods, the discipline has also relied on the webinars offered by Turnitin, our plagiarism detection service. The Languages Department Chair monitors Turnitin’s schedule of webinars, chooses those that seem pertinent to the English Discipline’s current needs, records the webinars, and then disseminates links to the recorded webinars so that faculty can watch at their convenience. During Fall of 2013, faculty
reported viewing and participating in webinars on the use of grading-rubrics and how to design assignments that discourage plagiarism.

To continue the work we have done toward improvement, we have also identified the following weaknesses. Initiatives for improvement developed to address these weakness will appear at the end of this study:

1). Our grading-rubric needs to be revised to include gradations of performance.

2). A list of best practices for Literature courses is needed.

3). Grading-standards may be inconsistent across all sections of courses.

Focal Area 4: Student Learning Assessment

General Education Assessment

The English Discipline participates in The Tennessee Board of Regents’ yearly, statewide assessment initiative in which Speech, Writing (English Composition), and Math faculty measure student performance. For this we use the same essay assignment and scoring rubric as we do for our ENGL 1010 Freshman Composition I General Education assessment. However, we have had to revise our procedures in order to assure full participation and accuracy.

Our previously mentioned sub-committee of Spring 2012 discovered that many part-time faculty members were confused regarding the assessment procedures. Faculty were to assign the assessment essay, complete the scoring-rubric, and then transfer the results to an online rubric produced by our office of Research, Planning, and Communication. However, these instructions were not communicated clearly nor frequently, and many faculty had “lost” the scoring-rubric. Instead, they were “scoring” via the online rubric which was not sent to faculty till the final week of classes. Since the faculty had already returned the assessment essays to their students, the faculty were completing the online rubric via memory. In short, they were giving the student a holistic grade: the assessment scores for C students were C’s, the assessment scores for A students were A’s, etc. Thus, the assessment scores offered the discipline no more useful information for planning purposes than a list of final grades in the course already did. Additionally, we learned that only 65% of the faculty were completing and reporting the assessment data at all.

To address this issue, the English Discipline created new scoring-rubrics that reflected the new SLO’s for the course as well as revised procedures for reporting and collecting assessment data. Beginning in Fall 2013, separate meetings were held on all four campuses for part-time faculty, with the primary focus of these meetings being to introduce the new assessment procedures. Faculty were shown a presentation regarding the new assessment
assignment and procedures and then participated in discussions about the importance of assessment for both the English Discipline and Motlow as a whole.

The new procedures involved the faculty being sent an assessment packet for each of their ENGL 1010 courses early in the semester containing the assessment assignment, instructions for recording and reporting results, and printed Scantron scoring-rubrics. At the end of the semester after having assigned the assessment essay, faculty completed the printed Scantron rubric immediately after grading the student’s essay (preferably with the new departmental grading rubric). These completed Scantron rubrics were then placed back in the original packets and were either mailed via stamped envelopes provided in the packets or submitted to an administrative assistant at the nearest MSCC campus who forwarded them via campus currier to our departmental administrative assistant. As the packets were received, they were sent to the Office of Research, Planning, and Communication to be read via Scantron technology.

Though this was a cumbersome process, it did result in our completion rate going from 65% to 98%. And, of course, we are much more confident that the data generated is accurate; thus, we are able to rely on it for our continuous improvement efforts in the Spring of 2014.

The scores for this new ENGL 1010 Freshman Composition assessment show that the discipline achieved its benchmark of at least 72% of students either exceeding or substantially exceeding expectations in all but one Student Learning Outcome. The discipline will form a sub-committee to look into this Outcome (“The writer has employed correct diction, syntax, usage, grammar, and mechanics in their writing”) and devise a strategy for improvement (See Appendix M).

ETS Proficiency Profile Assessment
The ETS Proficiency Profile test is required of all graduating students at Motlow and offers the English Discipline a means of assessing student performance in Critical Thinking, Reading, Writing, and Humanities. All scores over the past few years have been above the normative mean; however, the department has never looked at the test itself to determine how it reflects the skills students practice in English courses. We have learned that a 30-day access code can be obtained from the testing corporation, and our intention is that a small group of English faculty will analyze the ETS Exam closely in the coming months to determine how we can help Motlow improve student performance for this assessment tool (See Appendixes E and M).

Other Assessment Data
The English Discipline has available at least three other means of measuring student performance: an employer survey, an alumni survey, and the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE). These assessments do not provide the English Discipline with much data that can be used to measure and improve student performance because the questions asked can apply to more than just English classes and because the respondents may not have taken more than just Composition courses with us given their major.
Nonetheless, these surveys do provide some relevant, if limited, information. For example, according to the CCSSE student survey, Motlow as a whole scores below both the Medium Colleges and 2012 Cohort of colleges for Active and Collaborative Learning, Academic Challenge, Student-Faculty Interaction, and Support for Learners. This issue was addressed at our most recent Discipline meeting, though no concrete steps have been planned (See Appendix M).

The 2010 Employer Survey tells us that 86% of respondents felt that “MSCC graduates communicate effectively in general and technical writing” and that 72% of respondents felt that “MSCC graduates demonstrate an understanding of other cultures.” When asked to “list any strengths or weaknesses that you [the employer] have observed in MSCC graduates as related to job performance,” respondents listed “bad grammar,” though we have no idea how many respondents this answer represents. It does, however, provide supporting evidence that our Freshman Composition General Education assessment results (mentioned above) are accurate in that student writing is weakest in terms of surface features.

The 2012 Alumni Survey tells us that 80.9% of respondents felt that Motlow contributed to their ability to write clearly and effectively either Very Much or Quite a Bit (See Appendix N for links to these surveys).

To continue the work we have done toward improvement, we have also identified the following weaknesses. Initiatives for improvement developed to address these weakness will appear at the end of this study:

1). Student feedback regarding English courses is limited.

2). ETS Exam results are not fully utilized

3). CCSSE student survey results are not fully utilized

Focal Area 5: Quality Assurance

When this self-study began informally in Spring of 2013, our primary means of quality assurance was the collaboration at our discipline meetings (held once each semester). We would discuss General Education assessment assignments and procedures as well as results from assessments and how we might improve student performance. But because these meetings rarely involved part-time instructors, and because the discussions weren’t disseminated to the adjunct faculty, we had no assurance that procedures were being followed by what could be more than half of our faculty. We did learn, however, that only 65% of our faculty were participating in General Education assessments at all.

As a quality assurance measure, then, we created an English Faculty Handbook that contains all pertinent information for teaching any General Education English class. The
Handbook includes standardized syllabi, the Discipline’s grading-rubric, assessment assignments and procedures, the Discipline’s list of best practices, and instructions regarding administrative responsibilities such as reporting attendance, recording final grades, and adhering to FERPA regulations. We feel the initiative to create the handbook as been successful in at least one important way: it did clarify for faculty exactly how the General Education assessments would work (what to assign, how to assess it, how to report results, etc.). As mentioned earlier, our participation rate for the General Education assessment of Freshman Composition I that is conducted each semester went from 65% in Spring of 2013 to 98% in Fall of 2013.

However, as mentioned in Focal Area 2 above, we still have no real means of knowing that our new curriculum and quality assurance measures are being implemented in all Motlow English courses. All faculty are required to submit course outlines to the department chair at the beginning of the semester, and the chair orders textbooks for part-time faculty based on the discipline’s choice of adjunct textbook. So in terms of basic course design, we are reasonably sure that all courses reflect our new English Program Outcomes. Regrettably, we have no means of measuring consistency of grading standards or practices, nor can we say with assurance that our new SLO’s have been embraced and are being implemented by adjunct faculty across all four campuses, though we do now have reliable assessment data that suggests faculty are adhering to the SLO’s for at least one assignment in Freshman Composition, the only course we have assessed via the new procedures. While these are serious issues with Quality Assurance, we do have a plan for improvement that will be one of our major improvement initiatives at the end of this study.

Other than the Languages Department’s web page and the English Faculty Handbook, the only other means we have of assurance that part-time faculty are implementing our agreed upon course content, best practices, assessment procedures, grading standards, etc. are our Adjunct Faculty Orientations. These annual meetings take place on each of our four campuses roughly one week before the start of Fall semester and provide Motlow the opportunity to communicate policies and procedures to large groups of adjuncts at the adjunct’s closest campus. Presentations at the most recent orientations covered FERPA rules, Sexual Harassment, adjunct contract issues, and the Affordable Care Act. However, very little time was dedicated to discipline issues. The Languages Department chair met with English Adjuncts for 15-30 mins at each orientation and was able to present the English Faculty Handbook and introduce new procedures for assessments. But there was no significant opportunity for discussion or feedback. After those orientations, the vast majority of part-time faculty do not see the Chair again, though email is always available for conferring. Moreover, the number of part-time English faculty who attended the orientations was quite low, probably less than 25%.

We do, however, have a system for proposing and measuring annual English Discipline initiatives required of us by Motlow. These Institutional Effectiveness (IE) reports are proposed in late Spring, implemented and monitored throughout the year, and reviewed again the following Spring. Our most recent IE report was the impetus for our English Faculty Handbook in Spring of 2013, and the handbook was in place at the beginning of the Fall 2013 semester.
During Spring of 2014, we will seek feedback regarding the handbook’s design and usefulness and will report those findings in the 2014-2015 IE report (See Appendix O).

Regarding non-teaching responsibilities required of faculty, all full-time faculty are required to participate in advisement throughout the academic year. Each faculty member receives training in the use of our GPS Advisement tool, and each English Discipline faculty member is assigned roughly 25 student advisees. The faculty member contacts these students before pre-registration and, as much as possible, sets up conferences with his/her advisees to review and/or revise the students’ documented plans for degree or certificate completion. Faculty members are required to reserve and post two hours of their required office hours expressly for advising so that advisees may discuss their degree completion plans throughout the semester. The Languages Department chair receives a record of these posted hours so that the discipline has assurance that all faculty are participating, and any reports that faculty are not available or are not participating in advisement would go through the Assistant Vice-President for Academic Affairs’ office, and the Languages Department chair would then be notified. In Fall of 2013, the first semester of this new initiative, the English Discipline had 100% participation in advisement.

Full-time English faculty also participate in an annual evaluation conducted by the Languages Department chair. Faculty are required to submit documentation of their service on Motlow committees, evidence of their commitment to improvement as instructors, and a plan for achieving at least two professional goals before their next evaluation. Currently, however, this process of evaluation is designed to be a one-size-fits-all means of evaluation that all Motlow faculty share. It is not designed to be discipline specific. Moreover, the current evaluation model does not account for various elements of faculty performance that the academic auditing process will require. For example, our current model does not provide a clear means for the Languages chair to assess the extent to which a faculty member’s class activities reflect our new SLO’s.

To continue the work we have done toward improvement, we have also identified the following weaknesses. Initiatives for improvement developed to address some of these weaknesses will appear at the end of this study:

1). Quality assurance measures rarely extend to part-time faculty.

2). There is currently no means of evaluating part-time faculty

4. Potential Recommendations and Associated Initiatives

1). Adjunct Mentoring System.

In order to address our weaknesses associated with poor communication between full and part-time faculty, the missed opportunities to capitalize on the strengths of individual part-time faculty members, our lack of feedback from part-time faculty regarding their needs, and our need to improve our assurance that curriculum changes are being implemented and that
assessment procedures are being followed, we plan to institute an Adjunct Mentoring System. Each adjunct will be assigned a full-time faculty member who teaches nearest to the adjunct’s teaching location. This faculty mentor will contact each of his/her adjuncts regarding specific policies and initiatives (such as reporting attendance or General Education assessments) and will generate opportunities for informal discussion of curriculum changes and specific strategies associated with those changes. Because each full-time faculty member will have only 3-5 adjuncts to mentor, communications regarding agreed upon standards should be much easier and more effective than they are now. We plan to begin this initiative with an Adjunct Faculty Survey designed to gauge the needs of part-time faculty and measure their knowledge of and enthusiasm for the recent and significant changes to our curriculum. We will then measure the effectiveness of our system with another survey after two semesters of implementation and make changes to the system as weaknesses are identified.

2). Creation of a Freshman Composition Handbook

In order to facilitate the issues listed above in initiative 1 as well as to communicate more clearly with our part-time faculty regarding our grading standards, our best practices, and our administrative responsibilities, we will create a Freshman Composition Handbook. Because adjuncts primarily teach composition courses and because the bulk of our curriculum changes have occurred in our composition curriculum, we will focus solely on Composition for this handbook. The handbook will include much of what is now contained in the English Faculty Handbook, but will be designed expressly for the adjunct instructor of Composition, thus much of the English Faculty’s Handbook material on full-time instructor administrative responsibilities can be eliminated. Instead, the handbook will contain standardized syllabi, descriptions of assessment procedures, discussion of the English Disciplines Description of Excellent Writing, sample grading-rubrics, and samples of graded essays from Freshman Composition courses. The handbook will improve our quality assurance efforts by more directly communicating SLO’s and grading standards as well as, we hope, improving consistency of grading and curriculum implementation across our course sections.

We have also discussed creating a separate D2L shell for each of our composition courses not unlike those for Learning Support or online classes. These would be created to include a course syllabus and D2L calendar of events, policies regarding academic misconduct or the use of electronics in the class, statements regarding Program and Student Learning Outcomes, and statements regarding student services that our administration wants all syllabi to communicate such as those involving student resources, disability services, advisement resources, etc. However, we have not explored this aspect of the Handbook initiative sufficiently enough to commit to it at this point. For example, we are not sure how each instructor would receive his/her D2L shell and when. Would this be done by the Languages Department Chair or by the Director of the Center of Emphasis for Academic Technologies? Again, this is an aspect of the Handbook we will explore as we implement the Handbook.

3). Online Adjunct Orientation

We discussed our lack of attendance at our Adjunct Orientations in Focal Area 5 above. However, all part-time faculty are currently required to participate in an online orientation designed largely by our Human Resources department to communicate policies and procedures
related to Human Resources (FERPA, Sexual Harassment training, etc.). The Languages Department Chair will work with Human Resources to add additional materials to the online orientation regarding Program and Student Learning Outcomes, grading standards, assessment procedures, etc. As with the current system, adjuncts are asked to take a quiz after reading the materials and then have multiple opportunities to pass the quiz throughout the semester. Theoretically, future employment is contingent upon successfully completing the quiz.

4). Student Survey

In order to provide ourselves with more data concerning our teaching effectiveness and the extent to which our Program Outcomes are recognized and understood by our students, we will create an English Program Student Survey. This survey will be administered to all Freshman Composition II and all Literature students at the end of the semester. We will ask the students to describe the extent to which they feel they were asked to achieve both Program and Student Learning Outcomes and to assess themselves regarding how well they achieved these outcomes. Initially, we will aim for 65% participation in the survey. When results are available, they will be able to discuss them with the faculty in the same manner as assessment results are discussed. Strategies for improvement will then be adopted and communicated to all faculty.

5). Improved Discipline Collaboration Initiative

As stated previously, the English Discipline meets as a whole only once each semester. Because this may be the only time some of our faculty even see one another (due to our responsibilities at four different campuses), we are not capitalizing on the strengths, experiences, knowledge, and enthusiasm of our full-time faculty as much as we could. Too much of our important work (such as the creation of a list of best practices for Composition) takes place via email and then has to be discussed again in discipline meetings. In short, we need to meet more often. This would afford us the opportunity to address weaknesses listed above regarding the lack of utilization of CCSSE and ETS Exam results.

Therefore, we are proposing that the discipline meet as a whole at least twice per semester on a rotating basis at either the Lynchburg or Smyrna campus. Since our goal here is improved collaboration, we will publicize the meetings well in advance, invite all part-time faculty (using our Adjunct Faculty Mentoring System described above to encourage attendance), and encourage all stakeholders to propose agenda items. We will measure our effectiveness by attendance. Our previous discipline meetings have had no more than three part-time faculty attended. Hopefully, we can improve on that number.
## 5. Matrix of Improvement Initiatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>Performance Indicator</th>
<th>When</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Adjunct Mentoring System</td>
<td>To communicate curriculum and policy changes more effectively</td>
<td>Full-Time faculty</td>
<td>Surveys</td>
<td>In place for Fall 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Freshman Composition Handbook</td>
<td>Standardize syllabi; Emphasize Program and Student learning Outcomes; Improve consistency in grading;</td>
<td>Full-Time Faculty</td>
<td>Consistency of course outlines</td>
<td>In place for Fall 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Online Adjunct Orientation</td>
<td>Communicate new Program and Student Learning Outcomes; Communicate administrative duties</td>
<td>Languages Department Chair</td>
<td>Participation by Adjunct Faculty</td>
<td>In place Fall 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Student Survey</td>
<td>To measure communication of Program and course outcomes</td>
<td>Full-Time faculty</td>
<td>Participation by students</td>
<td>In place Spring 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Collaboration Initiative</td>
<td>To capitalize on Full and Part-Time Faculty strengths and improve communication of expectations</td>
<td>Languages Department Chair</td>
<td>Participation by Full and Part-Time Faculty</td>
<td>In place Fall 2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Appendixes

A. TBR Course Revitalization Grant Proposal
B. English courses offered F12 – S13 and Headcount
C. English Discipline Self-Study Workshop 10/4/13
D. MSCC Service Area
E. ETS Proficiency Profile Test Scores, MSCC Employer Survey, and Alumni Survey
F. Languages Department web page
G. English Faculty Handbook
H. MSCC Guidelines for Written Assignments 2011-12
I. Program Review Committee Meeting Minutes
J. English Discipline Meeting Minutes 04/4/13
K. English Discipline’s Grading-Rubric
L. English Discipline’s Best Practices
M. English Discipline meeting Minutes 01/13/14
N. CCSSE, Alumni, and Employer surveys
O. English Discipline’s 2013-14 Institutional Effectiveness Plan