

**Achieving the Dream with HIS 101 at the Loudoun campus and at ELI
Project Plan
Start: April 2009
Finish: Summer 2010 (changed to Fall 2009)**

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INTRODUCTION

At the request of Dr. Blois, I have been asked to investigate possible strategies that might be used in our HIS 101 (History of Western Civilization I) course as part of the college's Achieving the Dream (ATD) initiative.

According to the charge from Provost Tardd, the ATD initiative involves

1. Identify courses that have low success rates
2. Form faculty groups to
 - Investigate teaching and learning strategies
 - Engage faculty in discussions about best practices, instructional strategies, and interventions to improve student success rates
3. Develop a data-driven implementation action plan to improve student success rates

DATA APPENDICES

1. Success rates in HIS 101, Fall 2008 and Spring 2009, Loudoun campus and at ELI, provided by instructors
2. Enrollment and student success data for your group of HIS courses at ELI, provided by the ELI director
3. HIS 101 Overall Grade Distribution (OIR Data)
4. HIS 101 Grade Distribution by GPA (OIR Data)
5. HIS 101 Grade Distribution and Success in ENG 111 (OIR Data)
6. HIS 101 Grade Distribution and Lack of an English Placement Score (OIR Data)
7. ATD Data Request
8. Screen shots of Blackboard HIS 101 ATD site for Loudoun Campus History

ACTION PLAN TIMELINE

April 2009: Snapshot of Course Success Data

Check with history adjuncts to find out success rates in HIS 101 for fall 2008 on campus and at ELI

This has been done. See Appendix 1.

May 2009: Create a Website to share results

This has been done. See www.nvcc.edu/home/cevans/ATD/Index.html

April-May 2009: Request OIR Data

Some questions to consider:

- What are our HIS 101 success rates?
- Compare ELI and campus and look for factors that determine student success

This has been done. See Appendix 7.

June 2009: Snapshot of Course Success Data

Check with history adjuncts to find out success rates in HIS 101 for spring 2009 on campus and at ELI

This has been done. See Appendix 1.

Summer 2009: Second edition of Adjunct pedagogy manual

Charlie and Jennifer will finish an updated version of their pedagogy manual

This has been done. See **Project Pedagogy: Some Ideas for Better Teaching** (2009 by Charles Evans and Jennifer Lerner) is available in print and online at www.nvcc.edu/home/cevans/PP/Book/Handbook2nd.pdf.

Summer 2009: Receive, Review and Interpret OIR and other data for relevant determinants of student success in HIS 101 courses.

This has been done. See below, "Summary of Data Results."

Fall 2009: Adjunct Discussions and brainstorming

Share OIR data with adjuncts and applicable deans with an aim to brainstorm any ideas to improve student success

This has been done. See below, "Summary of Data Results (Additional Commentary)."

Spring 2010: Create a BB Teaching Support website

Establish a HIS 101 Blackboard teaching support site to include

- discussion forum for adjuncts to stay better connected and to engage faculty in discussions about best practices, instructional strategies, and interventions to improve student success rates.
- links to syllabi and home pages
- announcements
- useful sites

This has been done, and “Loudoun Campus History” is now available for all of our HIS 101-102 adjuncts on campus and at ELI under the College Connect tab of Blackboard. See Appendix 8 for some sample screen shots.

Fall 2009: Consider Strategies

This has been done. See below, “Suggestions/Recommendations.”

SUMMARY OF DATA RESULTS

The analysis of data measuring student success in HIS 101 on campus and at ELI indicate generally good rates of students attaining the grades of A+B+C in HIS 101 both on campus and at ELI. This student success has remained largely constant over the past two years despite a skyrocketing student enrollment in HIS 101. The on-campus enrollment of HIS 101 had risen from 304 (fall 2007 with 6 instructors, 2 full-time) to over 600 (fall 2009 with 13 instructors, 2 full-time); while at ELI we have increased from 132 students (fall 2007, 4 sections) to 325 students (fall 2009, 7 sections). It is great to see that success rates have not really dropped as enrollments have increased.

In addition to the comments below, it is pretty clear from the data that we tend to have higher success rates for students enrolled in the summer semester (both on campus and online). This is no doubt due to the higher percentage of transfer students who take classes at the college in the summer when they are home from school. But the fact that we have better success rates in the summer might also indicate something about the skills that our normal fall-spring students do not have.

Appendix 1, the instructor supplied student success rates for HIS in fall 2008 and spring 2009, shows that success rates can vary quite a bit from course to course on campus. This is naturally the result of the different syllabi being used, teaching strategies employed and student skill sets. With regard to the success rates in HIS 101 at ELI, it was pretty clear that students who enrolled in the second section of the course, starting two weeks into the semester, did not do quite as well as those started on the first day of the semester.

Appendix 2, the ELI-supplied data on student success, confirms the rather higher W rate for students enrolled in HIS courses at ELI. One reason is that the HIS 101, 102, 111 and 112 courses have minimum progress requirements tied to specific dates that must be met by students or they are withdrawn—that is not the case with students in campus courses. Other students in the online courses withdraw as they find the distance learning setting does not fit their expectations.

Appendix 3, overall grade distribution in HIS 101 with data provided by OIR. I am struck by the high success rate (grades of A+B+C) of students in the campus courses of HIS 101, usually in the neighborhood of over 70% (about 10-to-15% higher than online students). I suspect that one reason (besides those discussed above and below) for the disparity between the campus and online courses might be in the nature of the syllabi. At ELI, there is a common syllabi, which largely focuses on analytical writing assignments, across all sections of HIS 101, while on campus, there is a broad diversity in the syllabi and the kinds of learning activities employed.

At the same time, I remain suspicious of the very high success rates in some campus sections of the course, given my personal observation of the array of skills that I have seen among campus students.

Anyway, for the ELI version of HIS 101, success rate usually tops out around 60%. That seems quite good, given the different learning environment that online students encounter.

There is a clearly a much higher Withdrawal rate for students in HIS 101 at ELI. That is most likely because there are specific progress dates that students much meet (or be withdrawn) in

the course. Consequently, in the campus courses, where there are no date progress requirements, a higher percentage of students tend to end up with D and F grades.

Appendix 4, HIS 101 Grade Distribution by GPA with data provided by OIR. Here it is pretty clear the much higher frequency of W grades by students at ELI versus students on campus (and also the higher D+F rates for campus students).

Students with lower GPAs (below 2.5) have a much better probability for success in a campus course than online. Interestingly, students with high GPAs (3.5-4.0) tend to do better in the ELI version of the course.

Appendix 5, HIS 101 Grade Distribution and Success in ENG 111 with data provided by OIR, was intended to correlate student success in HIS 101 with previous success in ENG 111. From this data, it is clear that students with a record of successfully completing ENG 111 had very high success rates when taking HIS 101 on campus. This was less so but still generally the case with students taking HIS 101 at ELI. This data was not as complete as hoped for because students enrolled in HIS 101 often had no record with respect to ENG 111—often the case with transfer students.

Appendix 6, HIS 101 Grade Distribution and Lack of an English Placement Score with data provided by OIR, was an attempt to determine if there was an correlation between success in HIS 101 and the lack of student ENG placement scores. Note that there could be many reasons for the lack of a placement score, including a first-time student or a transfer student taking the course. In general, students with no record of a placement score tended to have a better chance at success in a campus course as opposed to an online course. There could be many reasons for that difference, including, for example, the different assignments and syllabi used for the online HIS 101 course versus and on-campus section.

Additional Commentary by Dr. Jennifer Lerner, Director of ELI

Clearly summer ELI students do very well, probably because they are a different population (mostly transient students) than fall/spring ELI students. You can even see some of this effect on campus--just not as much since your W rates are so low on campus already.

Part of the difference in W rates is, I am assuming, policy based. Do your campus sections have a policy to withdraw for lack of progress, the way your ELI courses do? If not, you are kind of comparing apples to oranges. I think this may partly explain the higher DF rate on campus--some of those are students who'd have gotten a W at ELI due to the policy.

In the earlier years covered, you can see on campus that spring students did a bit better than fall in ABC rates, perhaps because they are more likely to have the college experience necessary to do well in a difficult course, possibly including being more likely to have taken ENG 111 since they often take that in the first semester. However, that effect did not show up last year, and interestingly, it did not really show up at ELI UNTIL last year. Not quite sure what to make of that. May just be flukey.

SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Well, the question remains. What to make of all this? A pat on the back for good student success rates? Or are there still lingering questions that remain unanswered?

1st, it is clear that the success rate of students in campus HIS 101 classes can vary dramatically from section to section of the course depending on the instructor, syllabus content and assignments and perhaps time of day of the course (though I don't have that information). Because there is a common syllabus for all instructors in the online version of HIS 101, this is less so the case.

2nd, it is also clear that it is difficult to coordinate a large number of adjunct instructors to keep them all roughly teaching along approximately similar lines while at the same time allowing them to be college instructors and teach their own classes.

3rd, one reason for the higher success rates for students in some classes is the fact that adjunct instructors are far more likely not to fail students—although instructors who have taught several semesters no longer have that hesitancy.

4th, though not absolutely clear from this data, I still believe that students who have not successfully passed ENG 111 tend to struggle a bit in the course, especially the online version of the course.

5th, there does not seem to be much interest among instructors to examine possible determinants of student success in their courses.

So, along with what I have already done with regard to the action plan, the most important continuing activities will be the continued

- use of the Blackboard Teaching Support Site for history instructors at the Loudoun campus:
- mentoring/monitoring of both first-time and continuing adjuncts
- review of all course syllabi to ensure that they reflect
 - what students should expect in the course
 - the high expectations and aspirations appropriate to a college-level survey history course that will be used as a transfer course by many students
 - the opportunities for students to take advantage of outside tutoring through the campus tutoring program or the assistance of the campus writing center