

Cover Sheet for
ACADEMIC OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT INCENTIVE GRANT
2013-2014

Applicant's Name (Main Contact) Susan Groenke Title Associate Professor, English
Education
Department TPTE Email: sgroenke@utk.edu

Additional names /email address, if any:

- Kirsten Benson, Director of First-Year Composition at UTK, kbenson@utk.edu
- Shannon Jackson, District Supervisor of English/Language Arts Instruction, Knox County Schools, shannon.jackson@knoxschools.org

Title of Proposal: Crossing the Bridge to Academic Discourse: A Collaborative Exploration of What High School Seniors Need to Know to Write Well in First-Year College Composition Courses—Year 2

Brief Description (100 words, maximum)

The Office of Research and Engagement funded our project last year, which began a collaborative partnership between first-year composition instructors at UTK and 12th grade English teachers in Knox County Schools (KCS). Year 1 brought the UTK instructors and English teachers together to learn what "college-ready" writing skills look like. This proposal seeks to fund Year 2 of this collaborative, which involves videotaping writing instruction in the high school English teachers' classrooms, as well as analysis of artifacts (e.g., syllabi), and one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with KCS teachers who have expressed interest in continuing in the project.

Amount Requested: \$2000.00

Current matching support committed from other university or external sources:

Source	Amount	Title

Proposals for matching funding under consideration by other university or external sources:

Source	Amount Requested
Conference on English Education	\$4000

Submission Requirements:

- I have read, understand, and agree to all submission guidelines.
- I include a budget sheet with this application.
- Documentation of contact with partnering individuals, organizations, or institutions attached (if applicable)

Crossing the Bridge to Academic Discourse: A Collaborative Exploration of What High School Seniors
Need to Know to Write Well in First-Year College Composition Courses—Year 2

Susan Groenke, PhD, University of Tennessee, English Education

Kirsten Benson, PhD, University of Tennessee, Director of First-Year Composition

Shannon Jackson, MS, University of Tennessee, English/Language Arts Curriculum District Supervisor,
Knox County Schools

Specifics:

According to the 2007 Carnegie *Writing Next* report, 35% of high school graduates in college feel their writing does not meet expectations for quality. ACT reports that 1/3 of high school students intending to enter higher education do not meet readiness benchmarks for college-level English composition courses. College instructors estimate that 50% of high school graduates are not prepared for college-level writing. These statistics warrant concern for high school English teachers and university first-year composition instructors, as "writing illiteracy" has been associated with college drop-out rates and high attrition. Thus, this collaborative, university-secondary partnership begins with the following questions: What kind of composition instruction do students receive during their senior year of high school? What are first-year college-level expectations, and where do freshmen fall short in meeting these expectations? What writing skills do college freshmen enrolled in first-year composition courses lack? For what consistent writing tasks/problems do freshmen seek out the college writing center? How can high school 12th grade English teachers better prepare students for college-level writing, and how can university writing instructors build on the skills freshmen bring to the composition classroom?

These are questions a team of UTK first-year composition instructors and six Knox County School (KCS) 12th grade English teachers set out to answer last year, in the first year of a three-year collaborative research project. With funding from a 2012 Outreach and Engagement grant, we met four times during 2012-2013, with a culminating meeting at the Stokely Writing Conference on the UTK campus in June of 2012. At the first group meeting in the fall of 2012, the KCS teachers expressed concern about not knowing what college-ready writing looks like at UTK, or at similar four-year, public universities. Some teachers expressed they had "tested out" of first-year composition as college students, so never took a first-year writing course. Other teachers expressed that it had been 20 or more years since they were in college. Still other teachers wanted to know what "language is being used in the college classroom, so I can align my own language and talk accordingly." Thus, our first research question became: What are college-ready writing skills at the University of Tennessee, a public, four-year, land grant university? Secondly, we wanted to know: What disconnections and connections exist between the Common Core State Standards, first-year composition instruction, and secondary writing instruction in a school district that sends a large percentage of its students to UTK?

We met as a group four times over the course of the year, with our final first-year meeting culminating in a writing conference held on the campus of the University of Tennessee in July 2013. At the four meetings, UTK first-year composition instructors presented their course syllabi, and talked about the formats of their courses, the texts used, the reading/writing skills involved, and student strengths and weaknesses in their courses. We learned that at UTK, first-year writing instruction encompasses two courses, ENG 101 and ENG 102. In ENG 101, students learn and practice the principles of rhetoric, writing four papers that develop from rhetorical analysis of a text in the first paper to a source-based argument in the fourth and final paper. In ENG 102, the students practice various "cross-curricular"

research papers, with students conducting historical, qualitative, and secondary source research and reporting findings in their writing. We learned that the UTK instructors had recently revamped this curriculum to better serve students who weren't going on to be English majors, but needed to know how to write across disciplines.

We also learned that the college composition classroom, at least at UTK, runs as a "writing workshop" model, where students craft research papers around their own interests, career goals, and/or the fields of inquiry related to these or, when students are predominantly from one field, themes/topics and research skills (e.g., development of research questions, analysis of genre/craft, etc.) are focused on this field. Ultimately, in the UTK first-year composition classroom, students' own drafts become the focus of conversation and analysis, and the use of modeling and peer revision helps students develop skills with using sources. Ultimately, we learned that much of the first-year composition instruction fits the Common Core writing standards expectations, especially Standards 1-2, the argumentative and informational writing standards; standards 5 and 10, the "process" standards, which support the use of a writing workshop methodology, and standards 7-9, the research and "synthesize-multiple-ideas-in-writing" standards.

This proposal seeks funding to support Year 2 (2013-2014) of this collaborative project. During this year, analysis of artifacts (e.g., syllabi, writing assignment/task sheets, etc.), classroom observations, and interviews with KCS teachers involved in the project will be conducted to answer the following questions:

- 1) How are the Common Core writing standards and expectations for student writing being communicated in the district, and interpreted by the KCS teachers? How are KCS teachers' interpretations articulated in their writing instruction?
- 2) What are the KCS teachers incorporating from Year 1 (what they learned about college-level writing at UTK), if anything, into their own writing curriculum and instruction? How do the teachers describe or talk about the "college-ready" preparedness they are doing?
- 3) How are KCS teachers navigating the connections and disconnections they know exist between "college-level" writing instruction at UTK and district expectations for Common Core writing instruction?

Partnership/Reciprocity and Benefits:

As a public, land-grant university, the University of Tennessee has an obligation to serve its local community. Many incoming freshmen at UTK are graduates of Knox County Schools. In creating this partnership, we make the assumption that the high school composition curriculum affects the level of writing skill a student brings to the university. Ultimately, both Knox County secondary students and UTK college freshmen are who we want to benefit most from this partnership, as they reap the benefit of writing instruction attuned to their needs and the larger goal of helping them succeed--and stay--in college.

However, we also see that KCS teachers and university faculty benefit from this partnership in reciprocal ways. While Knox County teachers benefit from the partnership described here monetarily (to a limited extent), the impact is broader in that teacher knowledge and secondary writing curriculum are affected. Specifically, this reciprocal partnership impacts Knox County School 12th grade English teachers by helping them better understand college-level writing expectations, and by helping them design a more "college-ready" writing curriculum. Recent research reports that 61% of high school English teachers receive minimal-to-no preparation for writing instruction in their teacher preparation programs.

Many states require no writing courses for teacher certification. Another benefit for teachers, then, is an opportunity to discuss and learn about "best practices," effective strategies, and new resources that can support secondary writing instruction.

In a reciprocal way, this partnership benefits university faculty by helping them understand secondary writing instruction and district expectations, as well as state- and federally-mandated writing test requirements/expectations (which have historically encouraged a secondary instructional focus on the 5-paragraph essay form and prescriptive grammar [e.g., "identify the subject and object in the sentence"]). This public secondary school focus differs greatly from the typical college-level composition expectation that students use rhetorical tools of analysis to write in expository modes. It is our hope that this new knowledge—for both secondary and college-level teachers—will impact writing instruction and student learning at both the secondary and university levels.

Finally, university faculty benefit from this partnership in the area of scholarship. Faculty scholarship will be informed by this project, as we feel this project provides numerous opportunities for partners to contribute through publications and presentations to the academic research base in areas of practitioner development, educational policy, writing program administration, and composition pedagogy.

Shared Decision-Making:

Knox County English teachers certainly have a "voice" in this project. In fact, this project requires the voice of high school English teachers, as only they can attest to the common problem areas they witness in high school students' writing, as well as how they interpret and understand curriculum standards and district expectations for implementing standards. The high school English teacher participants' "voices" will be heard as they share their own insights, beliefs, and ideas about writing instruction with university faculty, and vice versa.

Assessment:

We see our work during Year 2 as assessment, in that we are looking to see what information, if any, KCS teachers are incorporating from Year 1 of this project. Also, a qualitative assessment of participating teachers' perceptions of the collaborative partnership will be developed and administered at the end of Year 2 of this work. This data will inform Year 3 of the project.

Future Plans:

A future plan is to also collect data specifically on Knox County School students who attend UTK as freshmen to gauge effectiveness of the high school writing curriculum that is developing as a result of our collaborative efforts. Ultimately, we see this partnership as a long-term endeavor, and intend to apply for more substantial external funding to support these much-needed collaborative efforts.

Budget Sheet for
ACADEMIC OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT INCENTIVE GRANT
 2013-2014

Main Contact Name: Susan Groenke

Email Address: sgroenke@utk.edu

Project Title: Crossing the Bridge to Academic Discourse: A Collaborative Exploration of What High School Seniors Need to Know to Write Well in First-Year College Composition Courses—Year 2

Proposed Budget:

ITEM	AMOUNT
Stipend for Knox County teachers to participate in interviews and classroom observations (\$125.00 x 8 teachers)	\$1,000.00
Transcription of Interview Data	\$1,000.00
TOTAL	\$2,000.00

KNOX COUNTY SCHOOLS
ANDREW JOHNSON BUILDING

Dr. James P. McIntyre Jr., Superintendent



October 3, 2012

To Whom It May Concern:

It has been my pleasure to work with Dr. Susan Groenke and Dr. Kirsten Benson on a collaboration between the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and Knox County Schools. Together, we are training teachers new to the profession through a joint presentation of practice and theory in the M.S. in Curriculum and Instruction course on methodology for English classroom instruction. Additionally, the university is working with our teachers of 12th grade students to build a better articulation between high school English courses and university writing demands.

As we move forward with Common Core and College and Career Readiness Standards, the partnership with the university is a very important component of KCS teachers' professional growth.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Shannon L. Jackson".

Shannon L. Jackson
National Board AYA/LA
Reading and English/Language Arts Supervisor
for Secondary Schools