A Comparison of Student Success Rates in Redesigned Developmental Writing Courses

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Abstract

This study examines final grades data resulting from six developmental writing course instructional models at Great Falls College Montana State University.

Focusing on grade distributions from developmental writing courses offered between the spring 2014 semester and the fall 2018 semester, conclusions about the effectiveness of traditional and alternative instructional models are discussed.

The purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of the impact each instructional model had on developmental writing student success, with the intention to make institutional decisions about how best to offer developmental writing in the future. Implications for further decisions and study are also discussed, including the need for experimental studies and qualitative studies of student perceptions of preparedness in both developmental and college-level writing.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Based on end of term grades, accelerated models of instruction result in higher pass rates than traditional models of developmental writing instruction at GFCMSU. Reviewing the data based on mean, standard deviation, and standard error, the two accelerated models (095 accelerated and 098 accelerated) show higher student success numbers than the traditional WRIT 095 model.

Hypothesis 2: Based on end of term grades, direct placement models (ALP, direct 101 placement) do not result in higher pass rates than traditional models of developmental writing instruction at GFCMSU. Reviewing the data based on mean, standard deviation, and standard error, the two direct placement models (ALP 098 and 101 direct) show student success numbers similar to the traditional WRIT 095 model. The ALP 098 model has a lower grand mean and a smaller range of scores, while the 101 direct model has both a similar grand mean and similar range of scores to the traditional WRIT 095 model.

Limitations

- Varied population sizes
- Models offered for different lengths of time
- Different instructors in some, but not all, models
- Required paired reading course with 8-week model
- Incomplete or limited institutional historical data tracking students moving from WRIT 095 to WRIT 101 and their success rates
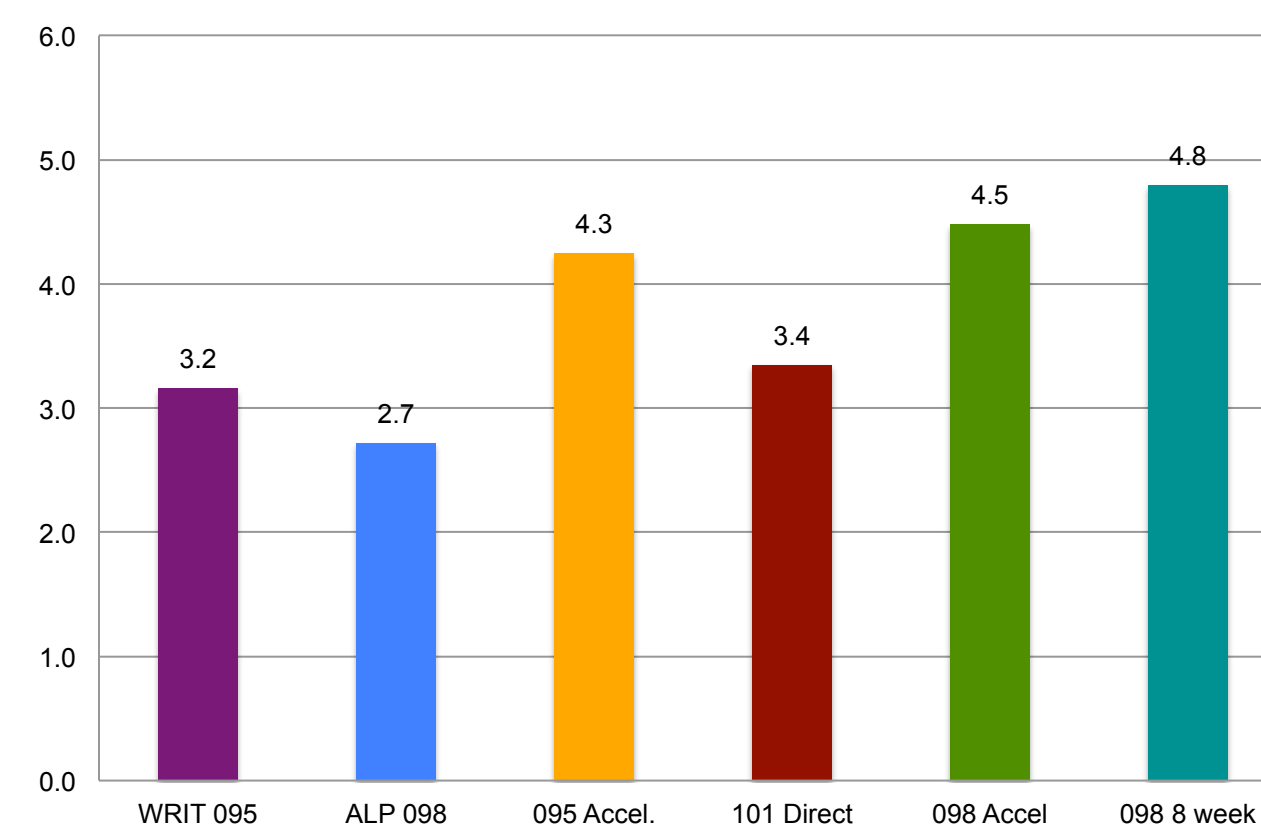
Instructional Models

- **Traditional developmental 095** (2 semester sequence) n=190
- **ALP 098** (WRIT 101 enrollment w/1 credit supplemental) n=18
- **095/101 accelerated** (8 weeks each, completion in 1 semester) n=36
- **WRIT 101 direct placement** (individualized support) n=52
- **Accelerated WRIT 098/101** (5 weeks+10 weeks) n=29
- **Accelerated compressed WRIT 098/101** (2 weeks+6 weeks) n=31

Methods

Anonymous and aggregated student grades were examined based on course section and semester. The Office of Institutional Research at Great Falls College MSU provided summary and raw grade data. Grades were assigned a numeric value of 1-5 for scoring and analysis. A "Pass" grade was equated with a "C"=3. Withdrawals were scored as =1.

For each instructional model, the mean of all reported grades per semester was calculated. Next, the grand mean for each instructional model was calculated.

Grand Mean Comparison of All Models

WRIT 095	ALP 098	095 Accel.	101 Direct	098 Accel	098 8 week
3.2	2.7	4.3	3.4	4.5	4.8

Examining the grand means for each instructional model using +/- 2 standard deviations shows an overlap in the score ranges for all models. The three accelerated models indicate similar score ranges while the traditional 095 and direct placement models indicate similar scores. The ALP model shows the lowest score range.

Mean Comparison of All Models +/- 2 S.D.

WRIT 095	ALP 098	095 Accel.	101 Direct	098 Accel	098 8 week
3.2	2.7	4.3	3.4	4.5	4.8
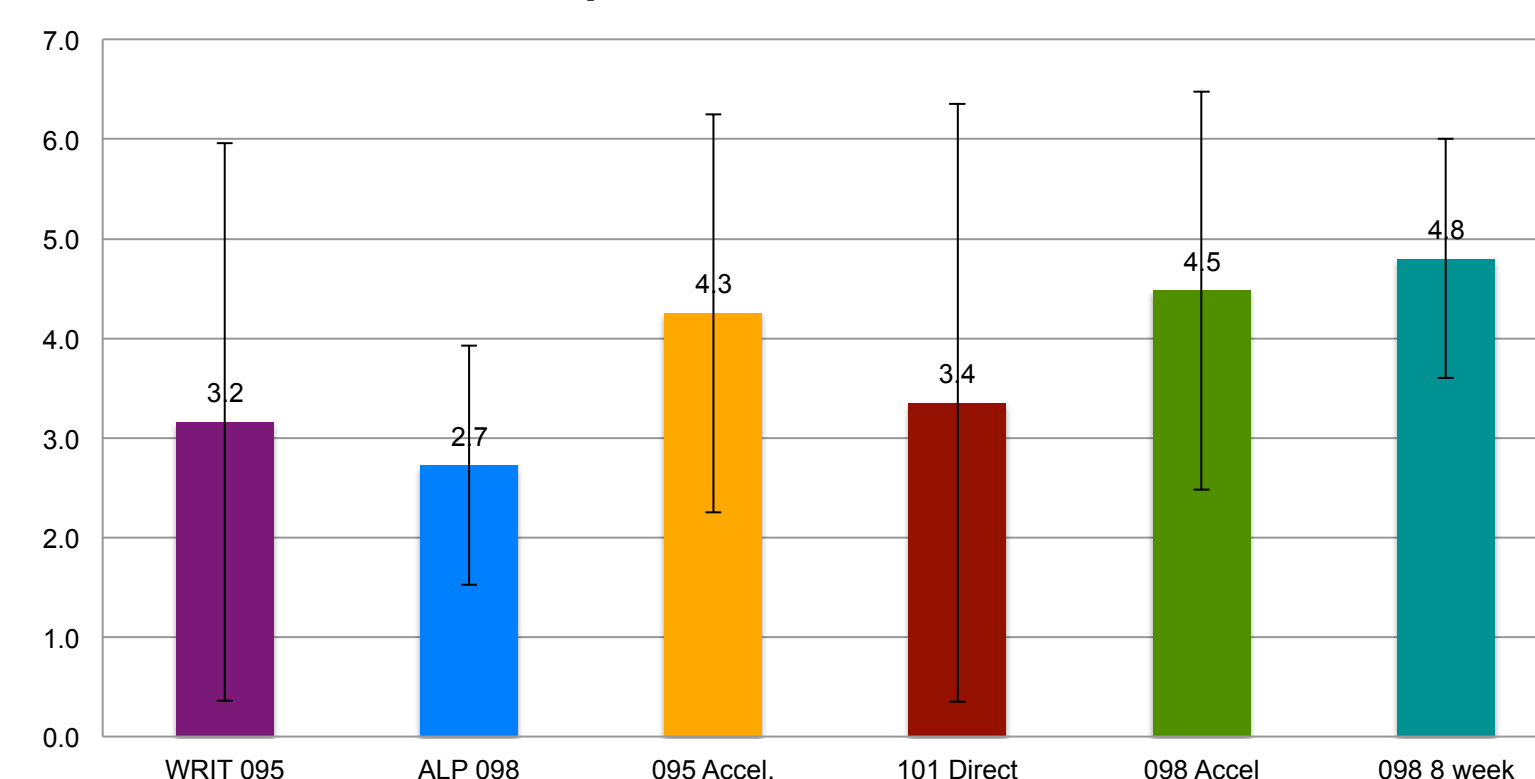
Examining Withdrawal Rates

The college's average withdrawal rate is 6.44%. The average withdrawal rate for all WRIT classes is 8.6%. The accelerated models indicate the lowest withdrawal rates, although there is no difference between the semester-long accelerated sequence and the 8 week model. Accelerated courses may show promising reductions in student attrition.

% Students Withdrawing from Dev. Ed

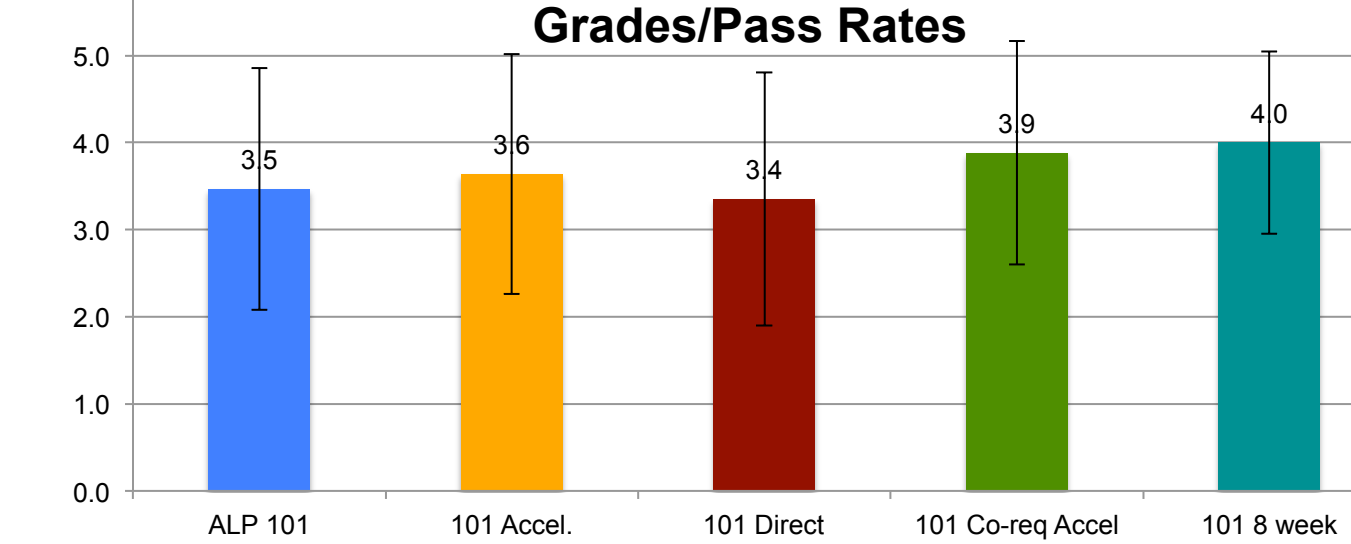| Trad 095	ALP 098	Direct 101	Accel 098	Accel 095	8 week 098
14	5	12	4	0	0
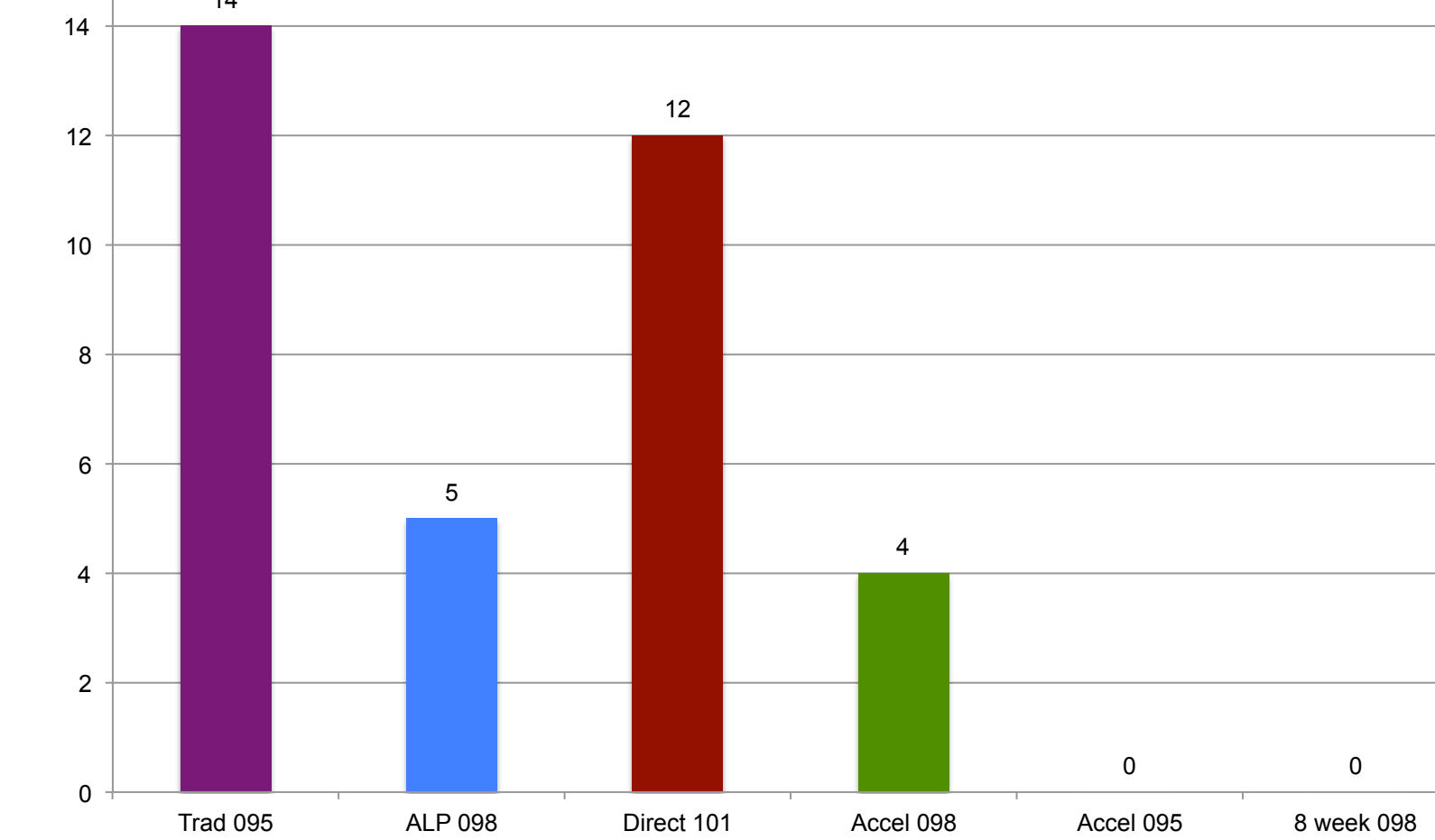
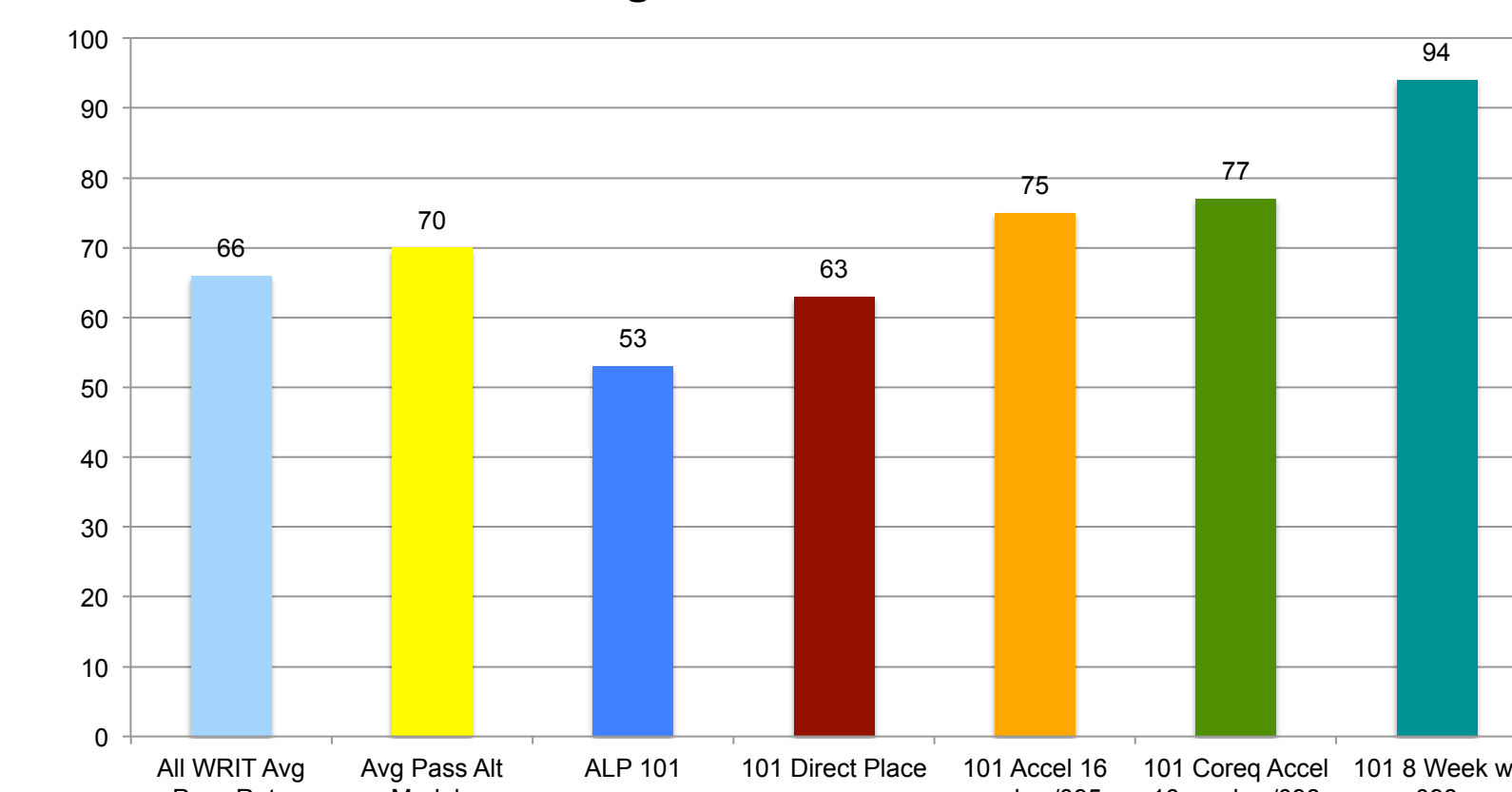## Examining Subsequent College Writing Pass Rates

Of the students who persisted into WRIT 101 from an alternative instructional model, there is no significant difference in mean final grade distributions. Students in both WRIT 098 accelerated corequisite models earned slightly higher final grades than in the other instructional models.

The percentage of students passing shows greater differences. The average pass rate for all classes at GFC during the study time (spring 2014-fall 2018) was 78.3%. The average pass rate for all WRIT classes during the study time, regardless of modality or student placement, was 66%. The average pass rate for WRIT 101 students who had participated in an alternative dev. ed model during the study time was 70%. Compared to the average alternative dev. ed WRIT 101 success rate, the ALP 101 rate was the worst, while the 8 week 101 rate was the highest.

Mean Comparison of All Subsequent WRIT 101 Grades/Pass Rates

ALP 101	101 Accel.	101 Direct	101 Co-req Accel	101 8 week
3.5	3.6	3.4	3.9	4.0

WRIT 101 Avg. % Pass Rates After Dev. Ed

All WRIT Avg Pass Rate	Avg Pass Alt Models	ALP 101	101 Direct Place	101 Accel 16 week w/095	101 Coreq Accel 16 week w/098	101 8 Week w/ 098
66	70	53	63	75	77	94

Conclusions

The traditional WRIT 095 model indicates the lowest success rates of all models studied. The ALP WRIT 098 model offers the second-lowest success rate. The direct to WRIT 101 placement model shows some improvement over both the traditional and ALP models, but it is less than the success rates shown by all accelerated models.

A compressed, accelerated instructional model that requires concurrent enrollment in developmental and college-level writing may offer developmental writing students the greatest chance of success.

Further study of the compressed accelerated model is warranted. Because the original population was small and the study was short, the results should be monitored and revisited, including long-term study of accelerated students' post-remediation success. Study of the impact of paired reading classes should also take place.

A qualitative analysis of students' perception of their level of preparedness, both upon entering a developmental course and upon completing, as well as their perceptions of preparedness upon entering and completing college-level writing would provide additional data on the impact of the compressed model. It is also important to acknowledge that focusing on developmental education without recognizing the need for further academic support in college-level classes fails to take students' needs fully into consideration.

Selected Resources

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