

PACE Program: Status and Future Plan

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Program Overview

The PACE program (formerly ACE program) began at Montgomery College in Spring 2012 after a Collegewide English discipline initiative to review and align our composition program to support retention, success and completion . The goal of the program is to help qualified, developmentally placed students move more quickly into college level courses by providing through an adapted English 101A course, saving students time and money and improving retention and success.

The English discipline recognizes that Accuplacer testing is only one measure of student ability and only one measure of predicting student success in college level courses. Recognizing that a significant number of students had a split placement of developmental English and college level reading, the discipline developed the PACE program to accelerate those students to college level course work. PACE gives these students an opportunity to enroll in special sections of ENGL 101A (college-level English) tailored to provide support for this population of students while they begin taking other college level courses. PACE students must:

- Be new to college (no students who have taken Developmental courses are eligible)
- Have a Sentence Skills Accuplacer score of 89 or below (developmental level)
- Have a Reading Accuplacer score of 79 or above (college-level)
- Submit a passing writing sample (assessed by member/s of the PACE committee)

Because these students have lower sentence skills scores, PACE classrooms provide them with extra support systems. PACE instructors can expect the following in their PACE classes:

- Lower class size (20)
- Heterogeneous course population: 9 PACE students; 11 traditional 101A students
- Embedded tutor for 15 semester hours
- Emphasis on college-readiness skills

PACE Design and Intent

PACE is designed for a very specific set of students, and in order to succeed, it needs to keep its focus on this population. PACE accelerates success for students who:

- Are new to college, but may not be recent high school graduates (PACE accommodates all students new to college, not just those who recently graduated)
- Come from a variety of high school districts, not just MCPS
- Have college-level reading and critical thinking skills
- Do not have “extreme” grammar deficits, as determined by writing sample

PACE is a very thoughtfully designed program, and it is extremely important to its success that we maintain the intent of its outreach. PACE is meant to take students who are college-level in reading and thinking and—if their sentence skill deficits are not detrimental—place them in college-level classrooms where they are more likely to be intellectually challenged and stimulated by course content, readings, and discussions. In a way, this program reaches out to some of the most “at-risk” students because it is designed specifically for students who lack some sentence skill basics but may quickly become bored or frustrated in a developmental classroom with simpler readings and assignments. By placing them in a more advanced class, PACE allows these students to stay challenged and interested, while supporting the development of necessary college-level writing skills, making it more likely that they will persist and succeed in completing their college level course work including the English composition sequence.

PACE instructors are trained to accommodate the specific needs of PACE students. For example, the following is discussed at training meetings, delineating some of the key strengths and weaknesses of PACE’s very specific target population:

	The 11 (traditional 101A Students)	The 9 (PACE Students)
How they got here	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through AELP, or Developmental ENGL, or counselor/chair recommendation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Reading exempt” on Accuplacer • Developmental Sentence Skills on Accuplacer • Satisfactory Writing Sample • New to college
Common Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College classroom readiness • Essay structure • Essay organization • Some knowledge of grammar terms and concepts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good readers/enjoy reading • Lots of ideas • Contributions to discussions and small groups • Fluid writers, not prone to overly rote organization (like the 5-paragraph essay)

Common Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overly formulaic in structure • May lack content • May have a hard time generating ideas • May have a hard time interpreting readings and assignments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty organizing thoughts • Difficulty developing ideas with appropriate content • May be underprepared for college classroom (unfamiliar with rules/policies/success strategies) • May feel disconnected from College (leading to non-completion)
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Because of this, it is very important to maintain a balanced classroom and a targeted approach to PACE student selection. We feel our current system is working very well to create balanced, rigorous, successful PACE classes for students and to accelerate an important segment of our student population to college level course work.

Key Concerns for PACE Committee

- How do we ensure all students eligible for PACE are aware of their option and take advantage of the opportunity?
- How can we promote PACE to both students and the college community and make its intent and achievements clear?
- How can we create a more streamlined PACE enrollment process to help more students enroll in PACE classes?
- How can we maintain the integrity of the PACE program as other, potentially “competing” programs emerge?

Priorities for the PACE Committee

- Keep class size as low as possible to continue offering increased support and individualized attention to at-risk students
- Continue to use and improve in-class tutoring to offer individualized support
- Continue to provide balanced, heterogeneous classrooms with a mixture of PACE students and traditional 101A students so that all students benefit
- Improve partnerships with Counseling and Assessment Centers to make enrollment process as smooth as possible
- Maintain integrity of enrollment process

Strategic Plan for PACE, AY 2017

- 1. Increase Enrollment: The PACE Committee will investigate and implement strategies to enroll more PACE students.** Every semester, we have many students who qualify for PACE but do not—for whatever reason—enroll in PACE classes. We have begun experimenting with sending letters out to students in addition to emails. We would also like to look into options that would “tag” students who qualify for PACE but—for whatever reason—enroll in Developmental courses. We’d like to try to intervene with those students and make sure they understand that they can enroll in a college-level course. We’re also investigating better communication about the program with MCPS and with the Counseling Center. We will try to create materials for the Counseling Center that demystify the enrollment process for students and encourage them to complete the writing sample if their Accuplacer scores qualify them for PACE. We will start by providing the Counseling Centers with an example of the writing prompt that they can show students, so they know what to expect when going to Assessment. All these measures are designed to increase PACE enrollment amongst our target population.
- 2. Increase Impact and Visibility of PACE Program: The PACE Committee will continue to stage and grow the PACE student conference.** Last year, the PACE Committee held its first-ever PACE Student Conference, where PACE students shared papers written in their ENGL 101A classes for scholarship prizes. This was highly motivational for PACE students, and it also gave the students a clear way to see themselves as academics, integrated into the life of the college. We also think this is a great opportunity to make PACE “visible” to the MC community and help others understand the kind of student achievement the program promotes.

Because this program is so in line with the college’s success and completion agendas, we want to continue to make sure students, faculty, and administrators are all aware of its intent and its success. We will continue to reach out and brainstorm ways to create more momentum and visibility around the program. Ideas for this include continuing to publish (as Elizabeth Benton and Rebecca Eggenschwiler did in the Innovations Journal last year), present (as Samantha Veneruso, Rebecca Eggenschwiler, and Jamie Gillan did at TYCA two years ago), and discuss this program’s merits. We plan to do more to reach out to students and collect qualitative feedback about their experience in the program as well as continuing to promote our quantitative results.

- 3. Maintain Goals and Intention of the Program: The PACE Committee will investigate and promote ways to ensure that we maintain the integrity of the enrollment process.** Last fall, the Transcript Pilot Program caused enrollment disruptions for PACE. Sometimes, students were accepted to both PACE and the Pilot Program. Other times, students were rejected from PACE based on writing sample but

accepted to the Pilot Program. We feel this is a blow to our program's integrity, and we want to work with those in charge of the pilot program to ensure that these two programs can co-exist successfully. PACE serves a different population and with a different purpose than the Pilot Program. We want to ensure that we can maintain our population and standards without interfering with the Pilot Program, and we hope the TPP will do the same for us. This will require working together to come up with a plan for how to deal with enrollment procedures.

4. **Continue to Assess and Approve Student-Centered Pedagogy: The PACE Committee will continue to provide and improve support systems for students.** The committee will work to keep class sizes low, and it will continue to provide training to instructors and tutors in the program to make sure students have high-quality support systems in place.