

## **Response to “Faculty Orientations Toward Instructional Reform”**

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In December 2010, the Dean of Academics at LaGuardia Community College encouraged the English Department faculty to hear a presentation about the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP), which permits upper-level developmental writing students to enroll directly in college-level English while taking a companion course that provides extra academic support. We voted in the same departmental meeting to pilot the program at our institution. In the ensuing years, LaGuardia has been remarkably successful in scaling-up ALP course offerings. We began with four sections in fall 2011. In fall 2013, we offered 22 sections.

In terms of the typology described in the *Inside Out* article “[Faculty Orientations Toward Instructional Reform](#),” English Department faculty at LaGuardia have largely been either ready to act or ambivalent toward ALP. Certainly, we have had no “loud minority” reluctant to adopt the innovation. I observe three reasons for this.

First, as Program Director of ALP at LaGuardia, I have tried to make clear what the reform is designed to do and provide evidence of its effectiveness. I have made several departmental presentations detailing our amazing successes in helping students pass both the CUNY-mandated, high-stakes exit exam (a 76% pass rate for ALP students, compared with a 50% pass rate for those in the traditional Basic Writing course) and the Composition I requirements (73% for ALP students vs. 79% for regular Composition I students). Additionally, I have often asked fellow instructors to talk about their experience teaching the course both formally and informally, which has served as a highly effective way to recruit more full-time faculty to join us.

Second, some instructors have been attracted to ALP for reasons not related to the reform philosophy. ALP instructors teach fewer students (ALP course enrollments are capped at 22 rather than the usual 28, and in the companion course, faculty teach only 10 students for an additional three hours per week), making the course highly desirable for work–life balance. Additionally, the college’s administration has provided small stipends for those faculty teaching in ALP for the first time to participate in professional development.

Finally, I suspect much of the positive reaction from faculty is because the primary innovation of ALP is structural rather than pedagogical. This means instructors are not required to adopt new pedagogical practices for students to succeed in this model; rather, they are encouraged to adapt what already works for them as teachers of both Basic Writing and Composition I. I do not interfere with pedagogical practices, and the fact that I do not helps with buy-in.

The flip side of a structural reform is that it can be more challenging to deepen faculty engagement and “move beyond ready.” During the professional development sessions in instructors’ first semester teaching ALP, instructors are too worried about the basic mechanics of the course to delve deeply into teaching strategies. In these sessions, I ask if they have noticed that teaching the developmental writers has shifted their approach to teaching Composition I, as it did for me. Some say they have experienced the same, but not many. Over time, as instructors consider ways to help basic writers accomplish more complicated writing tasks, they often reconceive the pedagogical underpinnings of their previous teaching strategies, but instructors do not engage in formal conversations about teaching ALP at all after the first semester, except in individual conversations if I bring it up.

Fortunately, ALP’s innovative structure has improved student outcomes even without sustained faculty engagement opportunities. However, two questions remain. Would outcomes improve even more if faculty came together to talk about their approaches to teaching? And, critically, how can a reform leader like me inspire ambivalent and reluctant faculty to participate in in-depth and sustained professional development related to teaching?