
Mixed-Level Freshman Humanities

Evaluation: Year One

Preliminary Results

2008-09

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Background

Mixed-level Humanities classes are comprised of students enrolled at the regular level and honors level. This model allows students to experience an honors level curriculum and then easily move up into honors level when they feel confident about doing the work without changing teachers. The new Humanities course has the following elements:

- A common honors-level curriculum (which is used in both mixed-level and honors-only classes)
- A common grading policy and grading scales
- Common semester exams
- Differentiated instruction
- Focused student supports

When the new model for Freshman Humanities was put into place, the administration directed that the course be evaluated over a three-year period. Based on this directive, an evaluation plan was developed around the overall goals of the new Freshman Humanities program: 1) to prepare more students, particularly students of color, to take honors level courses; and 2) to improve the achievement of all students in English and History. The plan includes the collection of formative and summative information for the purpose of monitoring program implementation, making programmatic improvements, and analyzing overall program effectiveness. The evaluation plan calls for:

- Collection of feedback from students, teachers, and department chairs using interviews, surveys and focus groups
- Analysis of student performance – EXPLORE-PLAN-ACT test data, course grades, common semester exams
- Comparison of demographics and performance to comparable prior and future cohorts

This report provides preliminary data and should not be considered summative. It provides demographics for this first cohort experiencing the new Freshman Humanities program compared to previous similar cohort groups. Data from honors-only classes are also provided for comparison purposes. Two surveys were developed by teachers to collect feedback from students and faculty. Response rates were high for these surveys: 97 percent for the student survey and 90 percent for the faculty survey. Along with demographics and survey data, the report provides preliminary data on first semester grades and common semester exams. Two prior cohorts were identified to serve as comparison groups: the 2006-07 and 2007-08 freshman students in mixed-level and honors Humanities with similar EXPLORE test scores to the current Humanities cohort enrolled in the new Humanities program this school year.

This report is organized around ten objectives, six of which were identified in the Mixed-Level Study conducted in 2005 and updated in discussions with teachers and administrators. These objectives are listed below. A final section focuses on student/faculty satisfaction.

- Objective 1: exposing more students to Humanities honors level classes;
- Objective 2: increasing the numbers of under-represented students in Humanities honors level classes;
- Objective 3: increasing the diversity of views in Humanities classes;
- Objective 4: providing the same learning experience for Humanities students enrolled for regular or honors credit;
- Objective 5: switching levels easily from regular level to honors level credit within mixed-level Humanities classes;
- Objective 6: increasing intellectual rigor in Humanities classes;

- Objective 7: improving student achievement in Humanities classes;
- Objective 8: encouraging and explicitly teaching students how to become successful in English and History classes;
- Objective 9: increasing teachers' understanding and use of differentiated instruction; and
- Objective 10: increasing support structures to help students achieve.

When summarizing the student survey data, students in mixed-level classes (whether enrolled for regular or honors level credit) are reported as a combined group since they responded similarly. Where differences occurred among students in mixed-level classes, they are noted. For the faculty survey, some items disaggregate the data for mixed-level regular, mixed-level honors and honors-only classes to highlight important differences.

Objective 1: Are we exposing more students to the Humanities honors level classes and preparing more students to take honors level classes in the future?

Overall, we are exposing and preparing more students for honors level classes.

- The number of students in mixed-level classes who are taking the course for honors credit has increased from 119 and 123 in 2006-07 and 2007-

Table 1. Freshman Humanities Demographic Summary

	2006-07		2007-08		2008-09	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Mixed-level regular						
Black	31	40%	36	34%	112	53%
Hispanic	7	9%	15	14%	38	18%
Low-income	23	30%	27	26%	134	64%
<i>Total # students</i>	<i>77</i>		<i>106</i>		<i>213</i>	
Mixed-level honors						
Black	16	13%	33	27%	52	23%
Hispanic	9	8%	12	10%	22	10%
Low-income	17	14%	31	25%	57	25%
<i>Total # students</i>	<i>119</i>		<i>123</i>		<i>229</i>	
Honors-only						
Black	13	7%	11	7%	11	6%
Hispanic	4	2%	4	3%	6	3%
Low-income	11	6%	9	6%	14	8%
<i>Total # students</i>	<i>190</i>		<i>155</i>		<i>177</i>	
Total # Honors in Humanities						
Black	29	9%	44	16%	63	16%
Hispanic	13	4%	16	6%	28	7%
Low-income	28	9%	40	14%	71	17%
<i>Total # students</i>	<i>309</i>		<i>278</i>		<i>406</i>	

- The data suggest that the majority of faculty feel that the diversity of students in mixed-level classes contributes “somewhat” or “very much” to a wide range of views.

A related question asked students about class discussion. Results are shown below in Table 3.

Table 3. Class Discussion

Student Survey	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the time	All of the time
How often do you contribute to the class discussion in your English or History class?					
English class					
Mixed-level (n=420)	2%	14%	37%	28%	19%
Honors-only (n=171)	1%	9%	33%	39%	19%
History class					
Mixed-level (n=416)	2%	17%	30%	32%	19%
Honors-only (n=169)	1%	9%	31%	36%	23%

Objective 5: Are students able to switch between mixed-level regular and mixed-level honors level credit?

Approximately 30 students, as reported by both students and faculty in survey items, moved from mixed-level regular credit to mixed-level honors credit during the 2008-09 school year. Only four students reported moving from mixed-level honors cr

Objective 7: Are we increasing the level of student achievement?

Several sources of data were used to provide information on student achievement in the Humanities course including grades, results from the common semester exam, and selected student survey items.

Grades

Compared to past years, we expected to see a difference in grades due to the following factors:

- With the new curriculum in 2008-09, students in the regular-level classes are now taught the same curriculum that students in the honors level classes receive. This adds to the rigor of the course.
- Unlike past years, the Freshman Humanities classes now have a common exam, which is reflected in the semester grade.
- In addition, there are now common grading scales for Humanities classes.
- The number of students in the mixed-level classes has more than doubled. More students are now exposed to the honors curriculum, and more students have the option of moving up from a regular-level course to an honors-level course. In the past, some of these students were placed in a course called Freshman Humanities Level 2 (regular level).

Criteria for placement into the Freshman mixed-level and honors-only Humanities courses are based in part on students' EXPLORE Reading and MAP scores. This is different than years past where placement was based on a combined EXPLORE Reading and English score, and a MAP score was not part of the placement criteria. To create comparison groups from past freshman cohorts, we have identified students who were in regular level and honors level courses whose EXPLORE Reading scores meet the current placement criteria, listed below:

- Students with EXPLORE Reading scores between 40 and 69 percentile are placed in mixed-level regular classes (EN4012 and HS4012).
- Students with EXPLORE Reading scores between 70 and 94 percentile are placed in mixed-level

Tables 6 and 7 show grades for the current Freshman Humanities mixed-level course along with comparable cohort groups from 2006-07 and 2007-08.

Table 6. Semester Grades - English

	2006-07		2007-08		2008-09	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Mixed-level Regular (EN4012/EN0002)						
A/B	62	47%	60	45%	32	27%
C	45	34%	38	28%	41	34%
D/F/NC	25	19%	36	27%	47	40%
Total	132		134		120	
Mixed-Level Honors (EN4013)						
A/B	81	88%	72	85%	125	76%
C	7	8%	9	11%	22	13%
D/F/NC	4	4%	4	5%	17	11%
Total	92		85		164	

Table 7. Semester Grades - History

	2006-07		2007-08		2008-09	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Mixed-level Regular (HS4012/HS5002)						
A/B	59	44%	64	48%	43	35%
C	43	32%	47	35%	37	30%
D/F/NC	31	23%	22	17%	44	35%
Total	133		133		124	
Mixed-Level Honors (HS4013)						
A/B	78	86%	72	87%	118	72%
C	11	12%	9	11%	34	21%
D/F/NC	2	2%	2	2%	12	7%
Total	91		83		164	

- The data show an increase in D, F, and NC grades in 2008-09 and a decrease in A and B grades across all levels of the Freshman Humanities course. In this baseline year of the new curriculum, a change in grade distribution was expected and is believed to be an indication of the more rigorous coursework and of more consistent grading practices. The pattern should be reviewed with teachers to determine if changes are needed in coursework or grading.

Common Exam

In the 2008-09 school year, common assessment exams were administered to students in Freshman Humanities English and History classes. These exams included both a multiple-choice test and an essay test. For the multiple choice portion, the departments utilized a new software program which allowed teachers to scan and grade the multiple choice exam and analyze the scores in a variety of ways, including using general item analyses and item analyses by concepts/skill areas. The teachers in both the English and History departments were able to use the item analyses to review items to determine areas of strength and weakness as well as to review item statistics (distribution of scores, reliability coefficients, etc.). The item analyses provided a means for teachers to look at incorrect responses to understand students' misconceptions. The overall average score for the multiple-choice portion of the English common exam

was 75%. The overall average score for the multiple-choice portion of the History common exam was 70%.

Objective 8: Are we encouraging and explicitly teaching students how to become successful in English and History classes?

Several student and faculty survey items focused on motivation, effective effort, and helpful strategies for students. Table 8 summarizes these results.

Table 8. Motivation, Effective Effort, and Strategies

Student Survey	Not at all	Not too much	Somewhat	Very much	A great deal	
To what extent have you improved in the following areas:						
Effective effort						
Mixed-level (n=423)	4%	8%	42%	29%	17%	
Honors-only (n=169)	7%	14%	45%	23%	11%	
Being responsible for your learning						
Mixed-level (n=422)	2%	9%	27%	34%	28%	
Honors-only (n=170)	6%	9%	36%	35%	14%	
Working in groups						
Mixed-level (n=423)	2%	7%	29%	34%	28%	
Honors-only (n=169)	4%	18%	36%	30%	12%	
Organization						
Mixed-level (n=422)	7%	12%	29%	30%	22%	
Honors-only (n=170)	13%	16%	35%	22%	14%	
Reading						
Mixed-level (n=421)	5%	9%	27%	33%	26%	
Honors-only (n=170)	8%	13%	39%	29%	11%	
Writing						
Mixed-level (n=422)	1%	8%	28%	34%	29%	
Honors-only (n=169)	3%	7%	35%	37%	18%	
Research						
Mixed-level (n=421)	5%	10%	32%	35%	19%	
Honors-only (n=166)	9%	11%	37%	31%	12%	
I am motivated to do well in my...	1 - Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5 - Strongly Agree	Avg.
English class						
Mixed-level (n=423)	3%	5%	16%	27%	49%	4.2
Honors-only (n=171)	1%	5%	10%	37%	47%	4.2
History class						
Mixed-level (n=423)	3%	5%	16%	29%	47%	4.1
Honors-only (n=171)	2%	4%	15%	30%	49%	4.2
How would you rate the effort you put forth for this class?	None at all	Not too much	Somewhat	Very much	A great deal	
English						
Mixed-level (n=420)	0%	7%	31%	41%	21%	
Honors-only (n=168)	1%	2%	25%	50%	22%	
History						
Mixed-level (n=420)	1%	7%	32%	41%	20%	
Honors-only (n=169)	0%	3%	34%	45%	18%	
Faculty Survey						
How motivated are your...	Not at all motivated	Not too motivated	Somewhat motivated	Very motivated	Extremely motivated	
Mixed-level regular students (n=17)	0%	24%	71%	6%	0%	
Mixed-level honors students (n=17)	0%	6%	24%	71%	0%	
Honors-only students (n=11)	0%	0%	0%	46%	54%	
How would you describe the effort put forth by your...	None at all	Not too much	Somewhat	Very much	A great deal	
Mixed-level regular students (n=16)	0%	19%	44%	31%	6%	
Mixed-level honors students (n=16)	0%	0%	19%	62%	19%	
Honors-only students (n=10)	0%	0%	0%	30%	70%	
	Not at all prepared	Not too prepared	Somewhat prepared	Very prepared	Extremely prepared	
How would you describe how prepared your students are?						
Mixed-level regular students (n=17)	0%	30%	59%	12%	0%	
Mixed-level honors students (n=17)	0%	0%	59%	41%	0%	
Honors-only students (n=11)	0%	0%	9%	36%	55%	

- Students were asked to rate the extent to which they improved in seven areas using a scale ranging from “not at all” to “a great deal.” For all seven areas, more students in mixed-level Humanities indicated “very much” or “a great deal” compared to honors-only students. Furthermore, about 60 percent or more students in mixed-level classes selected “very much” and “a great deal” with respect to:
 - being responsible for your learning
 - working in groups
 - reading
 - writing
- When students were asked to rate their motivation to do well on a scale where “1” represents “strongly disagree” and “5” represents “strongly agree,” students in mixed-level Humanities classes gave an average rating of 4.1 in English and History. These average ratings were equivalent to those of honors-only students.
- When faculty members were asked to rate their students’ motivation on a 5-point scale where “1” represents “not at all motivated” and “5” represents “extremely motivated,” the percentages fell along a continuum. Of the students in mixed-level regular, 71 percent were described as “somewhat motivated.” For the mixed-level honors students, 71 percent were described as “very motivated,” and for honors-only students, 46 percent were described as “very motivated” and the remaining 54 percent described as “extremely motivated.” It is interesting that student and faculty views of motivation differ.
- Students and faculty were asked to respond to an item about effort. The pattern of student responses differed from faculty responses. About 60 percent or more of students in mixed-level classes responded “very much” or “a great deal.” About 90 percent or more of students responded “somewhat,” “very much” or “a great deal.” Teachers’ responses, on the other hand, followed a pattern where the amount of effort as represented by “very much” or “a great deal” increased from mixed-level regular students (37%) to mixed-level honors students (81%) to honors-only students (100%). A similar pattern also occurs for the faculty survey item relating to student preparedness.

Objective 9: Are we increasing teacher understanding and use of differentiated instruction?

During the 2008-09 year, teachers participated in 11 days of workshops on differentiated instruction with Jessica Hockett, a consultant on this topic. In addition, teachers were asked about their professional development experience on the faculty survey. Table 9 shown below indicates that 68 percent of teachers found professional development to be useful “somewhat,” “very much,” or “a great deal with the majority (56%) indicating “somewhat.” About 34 percent only found it “a little” or “not at all” useful. The literature on professional development indicates that implementing a new teaching practice takes time and embedded support. For this reason, literacy coaches and staff developers are included in the workshops and during the second half of the year, the teachers participated in lesson study which includes planning, observing and debriefing a lesson that models differentiated instruction. Some of the teachers’ comments reflect this perspective. Teachers’ responses also indicate that they would like more support in teaching mixed-level classes.

- *“It’s a process--learning to teach this way. The professional development has been good--especially the one on one conversations that I’ve had with the consultant.”*
- *“The differentiation has given teachers a blueprint, but finding time to thoroughly plan differentiated has been very difficult.”*
- *“<The consultant> is great, but a few sessions throughout the year is insufficient. Much more is needed.”*

Table 9. Professional Development

Faculty Survey	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very much	A great deal
How useful has the professional development been for teaching mixed-level classes? (n=18)	6%	28%	56%	6%	6%
	1 - Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5 - Strongly Agree
I feel that I have enough support to teach mixed-level classes. (n=18)	0%	39%	39%	22%	0%

Teachers were also asked how they differentiate instruction. Typical comments are reflected below:

- *“Lots of grouping and regrouping; more scaffolding for students that need the extra steps. I also award points for evidence of effective effort--homework done on time, seeking extra help, attending AM support, etc. I use Moodle to post alternative methods of gathering information, such as PowerPoints, links to websites, etc to allow learners with different learning profiles to access material in their preferred way.”*
- *“Grouping based on interests, choice, and skills. Providing students with different options on projects and assignments--options target different skill levels.”*

Objective 10: Are we increasing support structures to help students achieve?

With the implementation of the new mixed-level Humanities program, several support structures were modified to help assist students. These supports include the Freshman Reading class, Project EXCEL, AVID, and STAE. In particular, these supports focused on the pre-teaching of key concepts, explicit teaching of strategies, lessons on effective effort, and other skills (time management) needed to be successful in school. The faculty survey included several items that asked how useful the supports were to teachers. The results are shown in Table 10. The survey results show that 100% of teachers found the supports to be useful.

How satisfied are students and faculty with the mixed-level Humanities course?

Students and faculty were also asked to rate the Humanities course with respect to satisfaction/effectiveness. Table 11 shows these results.

Table 11. Satisfaction

Student Survey	1 - Very dissatisfied	2	3	4	5 - Very Satisfied	Avg.
Rate your satisfaction with this course.						
Mixed-level (n=409)	8%	13%	34%	29%	16%	3.3
Honors-only (n=164)	2%	11%	26%	51%	10%	3.5
How satisfied are you with the level for which you are currently enrolled?	1 - Very dissatisfied	2	3	4	5 - Very Satisfied	Avg.
English class						
Mixed-level (n=419)	3%	10%	21%	34%	32%	3.8
Honors-only (n=166)	2%	3%	7%	19%	69%	4.5
History class						
Mixed-level (n=421)	3%	9%	23%	33%	33%	3.8
Honors-only (n=167)	2%	2%	10%	19%	68%	4.5
Faculty Survey	Not at all effective	Not too effective	Somewhat effective	Very Effective	Extremely effective	
After one year of implementation, how effective do you think this mixed-level model is for meeting your students' instructional needs? (n=18)						
	0%	6%	72%	22%	0%	
	Less	Same	More			
Compared to teaching classes that are more homogeneous, I like teaching mixed-level classes... (n=17)						
	0%	41%	59%			

- On a five-point scale where “1” represented “very dissatisfied” and “5” represented “very satisfied,” mixed-level students’ average rating was 3.3 and honors-only students’ rating was 3.5. Students were also asked “How satisfied are you with the level for which you are currently enrolled?” The average rating for students in mixed-level classes was about 3.8; the average rating for honors-only students, 4.5, was higher than students in mixed-level. Students in mixed-level honors classes gave a higher rating (4.0) than students in mixed-level regular classes (3.6).
- When asked an open-ended question about the strengths of the mixed-level classes, the following comments were typical responses:
 - “Everything that we are taught in our English class always somehow connects to our history class.”
 - “Class discussions, and adding different points of view to discussion.”
 - “Reading, writing and analyzing things and contributing things.”
- When asked how the mixed-level Humanities classes could be improved, the following comments were typical responses:
 - “I would change the texts we read.”
 - “Making it harder and more interesting. Also, actually getting work back would be great.”
 - “The amount of work/homework.”

responses were:
eed help.”

my projects and homework assignments.”
’t need much help, just more focused discussions.”

Faculty

- The majority (94%) of faculty felt that the mixed-level model is “somewhat effective” or “very effective” (scale ranges from “not at all effective” to “extremely effective”) for meeting students’ needs.
- When asked about the strengths of the mixed-level classes, the following comments were typical responses:
 - *“There are a range of students in the class and the students who are regular and are on the cusp of making honors are able to work with honors students and they are also pushed a little harder to do the same quality of work as a student labeled ‘honors’.”*
 - *“The strengths of the program are many. The connections between English and history are too numerous to mention. This program is right in the idea that we are doing something to equally educate all students. With the levels of planning that we have done so far, this class gives each student a fair starting place that gets them ready to succeed here at ETHS regardless of whence they came. It really is a launching pad for our students as they develop their own identities.” •*

data and open-ended responses to examine belief systems and expectations both on the part of students and teachers. Students were also asked to rate the extent to which they improved in seven areas (effective effort, being responsible for your learning, working in groups, organization, reading, writing, and research) using a scale from “not at all” to “a great deal.” For all seven areas, more students in mixed-level Humanities indicated “very much” or “a great deal” compared to honors-only students.

- **Objective 9: Increasing Differentiated Instruction** - Teachers were provided with 11 days of workshops on differentiated instruction. Two-thirds of the teachers reported that the professional development activities were useful “somewhat,” “very much,” or “a great deal.” The data suggest more continued professional development is needed.
- **Objective 10: Increasing Support Structures** - Programs such as STAE, Project EXCEL, AVID, and Freshman Reading were modified in 2008-09 to provide help that was aligned with the Humanities curricula. Faculty responses about these programs suggest that more work needs to be done to align these programs so they can better assist students with their work in Humanities.
- **Satisfaction:** Overall, ratings of satisfaction with the course on a scale of “1” to “5” were similar for mixed-level (3.3) and honors-only students (3.5).

Appendix A

A Lesson Before Dying

A Midsummer Night's Dream

A Separate Peace