

Chabot College
Distance Education Curriculum Support Committee

Course Proposal Form

2004-2005

Course Title & Number: English 4 (Hybrid)

Faculty Name: Richard Cartwright

1. Need/Justification

This hybrid English 4 course will consist of five on-ground evening meetings in the WRAC center, the first of which will be held during the first week of classes and the last of which will be held during finals week, but the predominance of the course will be online. The convenience of asynchronous education from the student's perspective combined with this handful of on-ground meetings, during which the instructor may directly evaluate student progress, should strike a happy medium between the on-ground and online methods of course delivery. As a transferable course, the demand for English 4 is pronounced. Offering it online gives additional opportunities to students that have real life time constraints as to when it is possible to take a course. Further, the online environment provides some students an enhanced opportunity to communicate their ideas to the rest of the class. Such students would include those that don't participate as much or as easily due to shyness or learning disabilities. In general, however, most students can benefit by having days rather than minutes to formulate responses to questions. Since the overall goal of this course is to increase critical thinking skills, writing skills as well as reading skills, giving students the opportunity to refine their answers to questions based on readings would seem to be a boon.

2. Course Content Delivery

The online English 4 is a 3 semester unit course and its equivalent on-ground version would consist of approximately 52 hours of on-ground instruction. This online version will consist of five two-hour on-campus meetings in the WRAC center. The remainder of instruction will take place online using the Blackboard CMS.

In addition to required readings, assignments, papers or paper drafts and peer reviews, each student can expect to spend at least 3 hours per week on the following:

- Group work
- Threaded discussions
- Online lectures
- Guided online field trips to various websites that pertain directly to the readings and discussions for a given week

3. Nature and Frequency of Instructor-Student Interactions

Notwithstanding the five on-ground class meetings, the English 4 will be predominantly asynchronous, though the instructor and students could potentially use Blackboard's chat feature for synchronous communication. Also, holding on-ground office hours for those students that "just want to drop in" is a definite possibility. Other than that, the main avenues for student-instructor communication are the threaded discussions and email.

Students need to make their presences felt in the class throughout the week, and not just at the last minute on Sunday night. This involves posting in the discussion threads throughout the week and responding to the posts of others. These are, typically, the students that make satisfactory progress or better in a course. Assessments and assignments will, of course, also be taken into consideration. At-risk students are those who repeatedly neglect posting in the threaded discussions, as this is the primary means of tracking attendance. An absence is when a student doesn't post in a given week or the posts that do exist are clearly put together at the last moment and are decidedly lacking in academic merit. In compliance with Chabot's attendance policy, 3 such weeks are grounds for dropping a student. Two such weeks in succession are also grounds for dropping a student. Poor performance, outside of the discussion threads, includes repeatedly doing poorly on assignments, quizzes and tests. Such students are most assuredly at risk of failing. In such cases where a student is at risk of being dropped or failing, the instructor will send an email to that student stating the situation.

The threaded discussions are probably the most effective use of the online teaching environment. This is because students and instructors are able to hold conversations, albeit spread out over a period of time, and discuss reading driven topics. Students have the opportunity to develop ideas with their peers with the overall guidance of the instructor. This is similar to the on-ground equivalent and serves much the same purpose... the building of a learning community. Assessments and quizzes, not to mention impromptu anonymous surveys, are ideal means of testing student knowledge, critical thinking skills, reading comprehension skills and to some extent writing skills. The essays track critical thinking and, especially, writing skills.

Students benefit any time their learning efforts are not wasted. In a carefully crafted online course with an attentive instructor these efforts will not be wasted. As in any course, the key is for the student to stay involved. While it's not possible to guarantee 100% student involvement, it is possible to maximize it. Providing students with stimulating reading and challenging them to put into writing, where everyone can see it forever, their thoughts on what they've read can be quite effective. As students have ample time to formulate their thoughts, there is really less fear of being misunderstood or of saying the wrong thing. Students have the time to say exactly what they want to say. Online quizzes and tests can give immediate feedback to the student. In a test that has no fill-in-the-blank or essay questions students can know immediately how they did.

4. Assignments & Methods of Evaluation

Students will be given weekly online quizzes to verify that key concepts in the readings are being comprehended and also to help the instructor gauge where adjustments in the course may be needed. Such quizzes will include multiple-choice, fill in the blank and short essay questions. The midterm and final exam will also be online, though the final exam will take place in the WRAC center. The final exam will consist of an in-class essay.

Four papers, one of them a research paper, will be assigned throughout the course. All drafts will be turned in using Blackboard's Assignment feature. However, accommodations will be made for students to use email or the instructor's on-ground faculty mailbox in case of an emergency. Papers will be 4-6 pages in length. The instructor (and sometimes other students) will provide feedback on student papers (the actual digital file) using a word-processing program such as MS-Word, and will come in the form of comments or suggestions in different font colors and then be returned to students either by email or through the Assignment interface. Papers will be graded on the following set of criteria:

- (Clarity) Is there clear unifying thesis that fully addresses the topic in question? Is there a clear conclusion?
- (Organization) Does each paragraph reflect the unifying thesis? Does each point belong to the paragraph it is in?
- (Support) Do paragraphs sufficiently support the thesis? Is there adequate evidence for each point? Is each point analyzed sufficiently?
- (Presentation) Is the paper typed? Does it follow MLA guidelines for citation? Does it have a title?

Students will be evaluated for mastery of course content in the on-ground meetings. This will be done through on-ground discussion of the readings, quizzes and in-class writings. During the on-ground meetings the primary emphasis will be on evaluating critical thinking skills. The on-ground meetings are also an opportunity for the student to ask questions of the instructor and of other students face to face. It is often beneficial for students to see each other and to compare notes... to help ensure each person is on the same page as far as the course is concerned. The same rule of thumb applies to the instructor.

Students will also display mastery of course content in threaded discussions. In addition to the 5 on-campus meetings throughout the semester, threaded discussions will be ground-zero for class interaction. Students will respond to the posts of others in addition to posting their own. This is key in the development of an online learning community. Discussions will be graded on the following set of criteria:

- (Clarity) Does the student answer the prompt or prompts for the discussion?
- (Support) Does the student backup each point sufficiently with evidence from the readings or other course related materials?

Note: All assignments (essays, homework, etc.) will be turned in using Blackboard's assignment feature as it provides the student with a reassuring message that the "Assignment has been received."

5. Technical Support

In order login to Blackboard, students should have an internet connection and a computer capable of running both a word processing program, preferably MS-Word 97 or higher, and a web-browser such Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator, preferably the most recent versions of whichever browser it is that each student chooses to use.

Students who have difficulty logging on can fill out the online help form and also seek help from the instructor.

6. Student Services

Students enrolled in an online English 4 technically have access to the same support services as on-ground students do. Particularly vital to the success of English 4 is the ability to search the library over the internet and to also login and search databases for purposes of research. But many other services depend on a student's ability to come to campus during regular business hours (many online students have difficulty with this). That said, all campus employees have email addresses and telephone numbers that can be found on the web.

Further, any sound course design includes a page of links to important campus resources and a brief mention of what they do. Online students can be more isolated than on-ground students and can have less opportunity to absorb through casual conversation, overhearing, or even osmosis just what the campus has to offer. It is vital for an online instructor to be proactive with this aspect of campus life.

7. Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Blackboard.com claims that its product meets all accessibility guidelines. However, this does not mean it cannot still be confusing or difficult to navigate for students with disabilities, and especially for those who use assistive technology. All 508 and ADA guidelines for accessibility of content will also be followed by the instructor.

Every effort will be made to accommodate students with disabilities. As not all disabilities are immediately visible, the syllabus will contain a section requesting that students who need accommodation contact the instructor. In the online education environment, it is vital for the instructor to be proactive with this issue because it's much harder to see what obstacles students are facing than it is in the on-ground environment.

8. Class Size & First Term to be offered

If approved, this course will be offered in Spring 2006. The standard enrollment cap is 27.