

# ENGL 313 RECOMMENDATIONS: IMPROVING THE STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

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# Addressing The Constraints of ENGL 313

ENGL 313: Intro to Professional and Technical Writing is an online, seven-week course that introduces students to essential concepts of technical and professional writing. Students must learn these concepts and apply their knowledge to assignments promptly after. The course is already well structured, and the faculty efforts to provide a supportive environment for student learning, however the modality and accelerated nature of the course still limits student retention and comprehension of the course content.

The University of Arizona English department provides various course of the same mode and nature. The non-traditional setting of these courses gives students the opportunity to complete their education regardless of schedule constraints, or other affecting factors. By adjusting the course to improve areas of concern, the barriers presented come down and allow students to have a more meaningful and successful learning experience.

My participation as a student in ENGL 313 led me to reflect on my learning experience and what could have been different to make it better. What parts of the course were strong, and what were weak, where did learning difficulties arise, and what would be an evident combat to the factors that impact the student experience? My goal is to contribute to the discussion an evidence-based recommendation that will function to enhance the course by providing students with a better learning experience that reflects on their grades, engagement, and course completion.

# Impacts of Accelerated Online Modality

## Non-traditional Courses Benefits

ENGL 313 is an accelerated 7-week session course of an online modality. This mode of learning in modern times has proven to alleviate challenges that students and higher education institutions face. When looking at availability, the flexibility of online courses has allowed students to continue their education regardless of time or scheduling constraints, in-person class cap of enrollment, and external factors that may affect if a student can attend a in-person mode of a class. It has also proven to be beneficial in other ways. Students that enroll in online courses will spend less time in college before graduating, preventing graduation delays (Fisher et al. 2022). Though these advantages exist for students taking non-traditional courses, inefficiencies still pose an issue and need to be addressed.

## Non-traditional Course Disadvantages

Academic performance differs in online courses, students tend to have significantly lower differences in course letter grades and completion rates for online modalities in comparison to traditional in-person (Bettinger et al. 2017) (Fischer et al. 2018). There are limitations in online settings that contribute to this in mix with other factors. Students may have flexibility, but an accelerated course takes more time and dedication. If students do not have good planning skills, study habits, and other certain characteristics relating to self-discipline within the course, they will struggle and have a less impactful experience. Furthermore, non-traditional students face harsher effects from external factors outside the classroom such as living off campus, a necessity to work full-time hours, or family related responsibilities (Zarifa. 2018).



# Tutoring as an Effective Enhancement for ENGL 313



## The Impact of Tutoring

College students that engage in online and in-person tutoring improve on studying behaviors which positively impact their grades earned and GPA (Hardt et al. 2022).

## Student Resources at University of Arizona

A solution to enhancing ENGL 313 for students to have a better learning experience and increase academic performance is to embed new assignments into the course for credit or extra credit that would require students to interact with student resources that are already accessible. THINK TANK at the University of Arizona has a dedicated writing center where they provide free services for students to develop their writing skills and knowledge. Some of the services include in-person or online 45-minute tutoring sessions with certified tutors, and feedback loop where you can submit your work to receive asynchronous, personalized feedback on your writing. They also offer writing workshops that focus on topics such as planning for big projects or what to do when you have writers block, some workshops are broad so students can ask about anything they might need assistance with. This could benefit students in several ways and aid in gaining a better understanding of concepts that they struggle with and strengthen their retention of lessons. It could also give students the chance to revise drafts for assignments based on feedback and improving their writing skills, and lead to better grades.

# Tutoring as an Effective Enhancement for ENGL 313

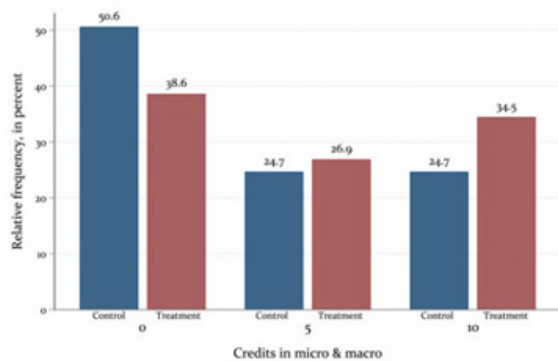
## Impact of Tutoring

By embedding tutoring and additional writing center activities into the course as a requirement, students are more likely to raise their chances for success and ease within the course experience. Online courses that have embedded tutoring as a part of a study saw an increase in retention which was significantly efficient for students and especially those that were of high-risk, first-time college students, and of students from underrepresented backgrounds (Kelly et al. 2022).

## Influence on GPA and Earned Credits

College students that engage in online and in-person tutoring improved on studying behaviors which positively impact their GPA and credits earned (Fig. 1) (Hardt et al. 2022). In Hardt's study, which was one of the first to focus on the effectiveness of tutoring in higher education, first year students were tutored by advanced peer students (similarly to what tutors the University of Arizona offers) in small groups of two or three. The most significant results of the study aside from what was previously mentioned

(a) Histogram of Credits Earned in Micro and Macro by Treatment Status



(b) Kernel Density Plots of Student GPA in Micro and Macro by Treatment Status

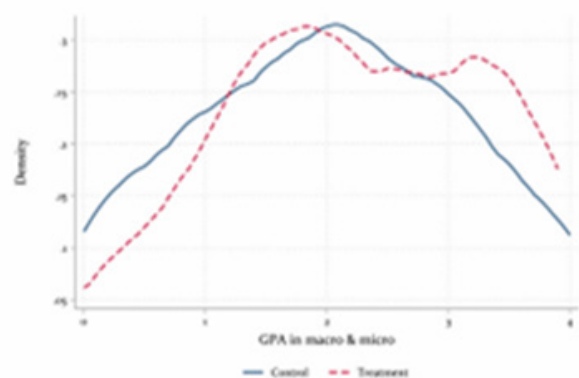


Fig. 1. Academic outcomes by tutoring treatment status

The most significant results of the study include:

- Higher Credit Accumulation Rates:** As shown in the Figure 1a histogram, students who received the tutoring treatment demonstrated a markedly higher distribution of earned credits in macroeconomics and microeconomics, pushing past the lower credit blocks observed in the control cohort.
- Right-Shifted GPA Density:** The kernel density plots in Figure 1b illustrate a distinct rightward shift in grade distributions for the tutored group. This visual shift proves that peer-led academic tutoring decreases overall course failure rates while lifting the average student GPA toward higher performance tiers.

## Essential Factors for Effective Online course modality

Based on the results in Hardt's experimental model, integrating structured writing center milestones into accelerated online timelines provides a scalable mechanism to improve academic metrics. It directly replicates these verified gains by changing independent study habits into focused,

guided learning interventions.

A meta-analysis was performed to review the efficiency of online learning college courses. The diagram below is a conceptual accumulation of all the noted features and necessary components for ensuring an efficient online course for students learning experience and performance (Fig 2.). Because of the importance features online learning brings to both the students and institutions, it is essential to ensure that students can perform as well online as they do in traditional courses.

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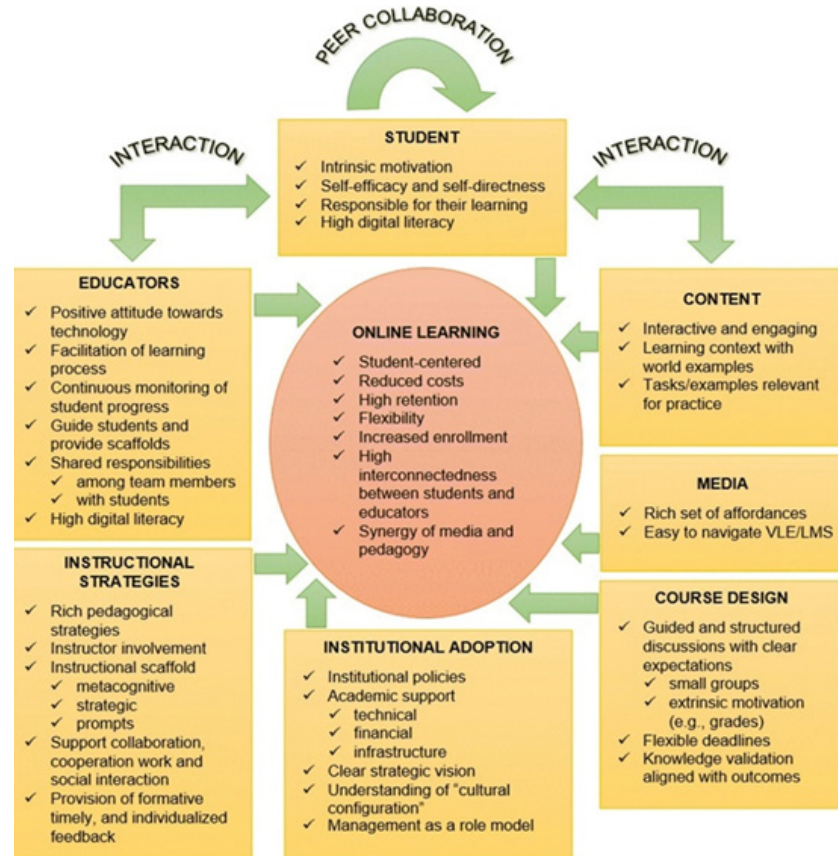


Figure 2. A Conceptual Diagram of Online Learning Settings

## Conclusion

This paper serves as a potential recommendation to further enhance ENGL 313 and combat limitations students encounter in its online, accelerated modality. Increasing student-tutor interactions through required course work can benefit students by relieving areas of academic struggle, building studying, writing, personal skills, and improving their overall learning experience in the class. This application may also be useful to other courses within the English department that resemble similar course features to enhance the student learning experience at the University of Arizona. Online modality courses remain promising and useful to students and will remain a part of higher education far into the future. With this, the design of online education models should continue to be evaluated for further enhancement for students and educators in online teaching environments.

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