An English 100 level course is required of all UH Hilo Freshmen. ENG100 is “Composition” (http://hilo.hawaii.edu/catalog/eng-courses.html). Depending on the results of placement instruments, students may be enrolled in ENG 100H, Honors Expository Writing or ENG 100T, Composition with Tutorial, “Instruction and practice in writing clear, effective university-level essays and research paper. Attention to all stages of the process: generating ideas, drafting, revising, and editing. Attending regular sessions is required. Equivalent to ENG 100 or ESL 100. Pre: ENG 100T on Writing Placement Examination.” There is a clear correlation between SAT-R and SAT-W scores and the subsequent grade in ENG100/T.

In the fall of 2014, 96 students enrolled in ENG100 and 141 in ENG100T. As of January 6, 2015, 96 students were enrolled in ENG100 and 119 in ENG100T for the spring semester of 2015. Students scoring 474 below on the SAT Verbal are enrolled in ENG100T, those scoring 475-624 are enrolled in ENG100 and those scoring 625 and above are placed in ENG100H. The corresponding ACT scale is 17 and below (ENG100T), 18-27 (ENG100) and 28 and above (ENG100H). Native speakers without test scores are placed using an instrument developed by the English faculty.

Our internal data mining indicates that ENG100/T grades correlate with graduation rates. In the cohort of FTFT freshman, Fall 2006, students who received an A in ENG100 had a 66.1% six year graduation rate (N=56), B’s were 41.7% (N=36), and C’s graduated at a 31.6% rate after 6 years (N=19). The eleven students that failed the course graduated at only an 18.2% rate after six years. The story for ENG100T is essentially the same. Similar correlations can be drawn between success in ENG100/T and success in other 100 level courses, as determined by their grades.

Our data is not sufficient to conclude that there is causality, but the data is sufficient to formulate the hypothesis that if we improve student success in ENG100/T, that we will increase the graduation rate of UH Hilo FTFT Freshmen. This hypothesis makes intuitive sense given the concerning Lexile score results of some of our incoming students, which in turn reflect the large proportion of Big Island students who speak languages other than English in their communities and homes.

The faculty of the Department of English are in the process of developing a new language arts initiative, and it will be a subject of the one day mini-retreat on March 20, 2015, with EDI. It is expected that additional materials will be sent to EDI prior to the meeting in March.