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Developing University Literacy and Promoting Academic Success across Disciplines: A Case Study of French-Language University Literacy

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Introduction.....	5
Relevance	6
Literature Review	7
Context	8
Study Design.....	14
Setting the Stage: Creating FRA1705.....	15
Collaborative Planning	17
Course Development Committee.....	17
Pedagogical Team Meetings: Ensuring a Shared Vision and Practice	18
Recruiting Students.....	19
Findings/Results.....	19
A) From the Students’ Perspective: Expectations to Impressions to Verdict	19
Initial Survey – August 2012	19
Second Survey – November 2012.....	20
First Focus Group – November 2012	20
Third Survey – March 2013	21
Second Focus Group – March 2013.....	21
Comparison Group: Focus Group.....	22
B) From the Pedagogical Support Team and Instructors’ Perspectives.....	23
C) From an Academic Performance Perspective: Experimental vs. Comparison Group	24
Limitations.....	27
Conclusion.....	27
References.....	30

List of Figures

Figure 1: Undergraduate Enrolment Program Language of Instruction, Fall 2012 Cohort	9
Figure 2: Distribution by Entry Pathway of First-Year Students in English Programs, Fall 2012 Cohort	9
Figure 3: Distribution by Entry Pathway of First-Year Students in Francophone Programs, Fall 2012 Cohort	10
Figure 4: Ratio of Direct-Entry First-Year Registered Students from Ontario by Mother Tongue (FMT= French Mother Tongue, EMT= English Mother Tongue), Cohorts 2000-2011	11
Figure 5: Line Fit Plot of Student GPA after 1 Session and FRA4U Final Grade (2008-2012)	13
Figure 6: Line Fit Plot of Student CGPA after 1 Session and ENG4U Final Grade (2008-2012).....	14

List of Tables

Table 1: Characteristics of Experimental and Comparison Groups	24
Table 2: GPA, End of Session 1 (December 2012)	25
Table 3: Student Achievement, Experimental and Control Groups, 2012, End of Year 1	25
Table 4: Effect of FRA1705 on GPA	26
Table 5: Student Success Data by Group, 2012	27

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of a one-year study of the creation and implementation of a new *Français* course at the University of Ottawa, offered as a pilot project in 2012-2013. The course was created at the request of francophone first-year students from regions of Canada where the French language is in a minority context. These students reported experiencing difficulty in bridging the gap between the literacy skills they acquired in secondary school and the academic literacy skills required of them to succeed in the mandatory foundational French courses (FRA courses) and other courses taught in French (Lamoureux et al., 2013).

A closer look at the field of academic literacy reveals that this situation is not unique to Francophones in a minority context or to minority language students in PSE in Canada. In light of the increased heterogeneity of students due in part to increased mobility and the massification of higher education, both researchers and PSE institutions are exploring various solutions to help students better transition to PSE, taking into account the variety of their educational pathways, linguistic backgrounds and educational jurisdiction provenance. Beyond this, they are also considering various tools and strategies to help students succeed academically and socially and meet the demands of the globalized knowledge economy when they enter the workforce.

This report documents the creation and implementation of the FRA1705 course and presents the findings of the study that tracked the pilot project. Despite the limitations presented by a small sample size, participants reported feeling that FRA1705 had positively impacted their academic success as it pertained to writing in French for their courses taught in French but not necessarily for their FRA courses. Furthermore, they reported that the FRA1705 course had also contributed to improving their oral communication skills in French. Finally, students stated that the course provided them with the opportunity to become more confident in their “*métier d’étudiant*” (Coulon, 2005), which in turn positively impacted their social and academic integration into the University of Ottawa community. The small class sizes and having an instructor who knew them by name was, according to participants, important to a positive transition to university, as was learning the FRA1705 course content.

The course instructors and designers confirmed that students improved their writing skills throughout the course, as evidenced not only by the writing produced for assessments but also by the students’ increased autonomy and confidence as writers and editors of their own work. Finally, the quantitative analysis of student academic performance data for the experimental and comparison groups supports the qualitative findings. This pilot study confirms that FRA1705 significantly impacted students’ academic success in their other courses offered in French, although it did not impact their academic success in their other FRA courses. Hence, focusing on students’ academic literacy in FRA1705 also promoted their academic performance across disciplines in courses taught in French. The findings demonstrate the positive impact of providing students with different pathways within the institution as they complete their degrees. Finally, the findings highlight the need for far-ranging discussions of the purpose and scope of foundational language courses in both French and English programs.

Introduction

This report presents the findings of a pilot study conducted at the University of Ottawa in 2012-2013 examining the design and implementation of a new language course (FRA1705) created specifically to meet the needs of French first-language students from regions where the French language is in a minority context and often minoritized.¹ The objective of this course was to help students bridge the gap between the literacy skills and competencies required in secondary school pre-university track courses and the literacy skills and competencies required in university undergraduate social sciences and humanities programs taught in French at the University of Ottawa.

As noted in HEQCO's @Issue Paper No. 16, there is "growing concern" that the literacy skills of students attending and graduating from postsecondary education (PSE) institutions "are not meeting expectations" (Dion & Maldonado, 2013a, p. 1). This situation is not unique or limited to French first-language students in a minority language context. Rather, there is a general lack of clarity concerning expectations of acquired literacy skills both for admission to PSE institutions and as an outcome at graduation from these same institutions. This gap in literacy can be attributed at least in part to any one or a combination of three evolving realities of PSE in Canada: 1) the massification of higher education, which results in increased access and students with a wider variety of skills attending PSE institutions, 2) the growth in the number of possible pathways to PSE, and 3) the increasingly heterogeneous student population, with individuals coming from multiple education jurisdictions.

From a perspective of research-informed practice and policy, this project is both timely and important. As we explore new ways of increasing student access, we must also explore ways to help support students' successful and timely completion of degrees. As students enter PSE by increasingly diverse pathways, with greater linguistic heterogeneity, from a larger number of educational jurisdictions each with their own standards of educational attainment at graduation, questions of "university literacy" preparedness are becoming more significant.

In September 2011, the French-language policy and programs branch of Ontario's Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) launched the *Politique d'aménagement linguistique pour l'éducation postsecondaire et la formation en langue française en Ontario* (Ontario MFCU, 2011) (PAL), a policy framework to support the promotion of the French language and the sustainability of Francophone culture in Ontario. It sought to ensure that students who pursue training and PSE opportunities in French in the province are competitive to access Ontario's labour market. This policy framework identifies different areas of intervention and strategic aims to ensure that Ontario's PSE institutions meet the needs of the province's dynamic and diverse Francophone communities. One of these strategic aims identifies reinforcing students' capacities to achieve the highest possible level of French language competency and sustain their language proficiency training (Ontario MFCU, 2011).² There is recognition that Francophones who come from an area

¹ At the University of Ottawa, 60% of our direct-entry francophone students come from communities with 5% to 20% French speakers, with another 9.7% from communities with less than 5% of French speakers. A student from Hawkesbury (Ontario), where 90.4% of the population speaks French, has had more opportunities to speak French outside of an academic setting than another student from North Bay (17.1%) or Brampton (1%). In many Canadian communities, the French language is also minoritized, in that some members of the broader community do not widely value the other official language and even marginalize or question its use, limiting even more profoundly the public spaces where French can be spoken and the value of French (Lamoureux et al., 2013)

² The French text reads: "Améliorer la qualité de l'enseignement postsecondaire et de la formation en français en renforçant la capacité du personnel institutionnel et des étudiantes et étudiants d'atteindre le niveau le plus élevé possible de compétence en français et de soutenir le perfectionnement linguistique et l'épanouissement culturel de la communauté Francophone" (Ontario MFCU, 2011, p. 12).

of the province where French is a minority language may require additional language support to achieve success in PSE. As reported in Lamoureux et al. (2013), students participating in the University of Ottawa's Peer Regional Mentoring Initiative asked senior university administrators to develop a new course aimed at increasing their university-level French literacy skills in order to help francophone students from minority French communities succeed to the best of their abilities.

At present, although there may be multiple pathways leading to enrolment at the University of Ottawa, there is generally only one pathway to meet degree requirements once all entrance requirements are met. This is significant given that students can be admitted to certain university programs without certain prerequisites, such as calculus, chemistry or physics, provided that they register in not-for-credit courses to bridge into the first-year course or, in the case of chemistry for example, are registered in a three-credit first-year course with an additional lecture to help recover some of the material usually presented in Ontario's grade 12 pre-university chemistry. Students who have completed Advanced Placement (AP) classes, the International Baccalaureate (IB) or who transfer to university from other PSE institutions (college transfers, CEGEP or university transfer students) may be granted equivalencies exempting them from certain courses. However, the pathway to degree completion remains mostly unchanged regardless of the pathway into the university.

At the University of Ottawa, students in most social sciences and humanities programs have to take two mandatory foundational language courses as part of their degree requirements. For students studying in French programs³, these courses are FRA1710 *Littérature et lecture du monde* and FRA1720 *Littérature et plaisir d'écrire*. Both courses share the same goal: to help students produce high-quality university-level written work. The course outline for FRA1710 warns students in bold, underlined type that their mastery of the French language will not only impact their success at university regardless of their program of study, but also their integration into and success in the workforce (*Département de français*, 2012, p. 2).⁴ FRA1710 focuses on two types (genres) of texts, the summary (*le résumé*) and the report (*le compte-rendu*), and is typically offered in the fall semester, whereas FRA1720 focuses on the literary essay and is typically offered in the winter semester. These courses do not focus on the mechanics of language but rather on the production of three types or genres of text. Students registered in the *Français* program do not take FRA1710 or FRA1720. The Ontario admission requirement FRA4U (or grade 12 *Français* from another jurisdiction) is the prerequisite for FRA1710, which then serves as the prerequisite for FRA1720.

Relevance

The findings of this project are relevant to the continued vitality of Ontario's francophone community, which is increasingly diverse in terms of the varieties of French used and the preferred language register used in daily interaction. This diversity is tied to the historical geographic evolution of the language across Ontario, to inter- and intra-provincial mobility, and to growing immigration from countries of the international *Francophonie*. Consequently, in order to support all students who continue their PSE studies in French, including graduates of French Immersion programs, there is a need to ensure that they have the required literacy skills to succeed, as well as to meet globalized labour market literacy demands.

³ To increase the flow of this report, all subsequent uses of the terms "French programs" and "English programs" will refer to programs where the medium of instruction is French or English, as the case may be.

⁴ "Votre maîtrise de la langue conditionnera non seulement vos résultats universitaires, et ce, quel que soit votre programme d'étude, mais aussi votre entrée dans la vie professionnelle" (*Département de français, Université d'Ottawa*, 2012, p. 2)

Although the results presented in this report address questions relating to francophone students at a bilingual university in Ontario, the goals of the project and its findings are relevant to PSE institutions in Ontario and beyond that are welcoming increasingly heterogeneous students from a variety of pathways, linguistic backgrounds and educational jurisdictions.

Literature Review

In light of globalization, increased student mobility and the massification of higher education, academic or postsecondary literacy has taken on a new sense of urgency within higher education (Benesch, 2001; Chun, 2009, 2010). Two recent articles in *University Affairs* (Dion & Maldonado, 2013b; Graves & Slomp, 2013) provide insight into the complex and varied elements to be considered in the field of academic literacy from institutional and educational systems' perspectives. Recent *Globe and Mail* articles (Alphonso & Grant, 2013; Ross, 2013), on the other hand, confirm that the field of study of academic literacies, including foundational courses, is also integrating the public debate.

The themes addressed in both the anglophone and the francophone academic communities are quite similar, though much of the work in francophone communities approaches the topic from the perspective of postsecondary pedagogy and psychopedagogy, rather than sociolinguistics which is more prevalent in the anglophone literature. The academic setting that is the University of Ottawa, a bilingual university where anglophone and francophone traditions share the stage across many disciplines, encouraged us to draw on the broadest possible range of scholarship to guide our reflection and ground our study.

Academic or postsecondary literacy is now a well-defined field of research within Anglo-Saxon academic circles, with two decades of scientific production exploring student writing in academic settings (Barkas, 2011; Dias, Freedman, Medway & Par, 1999; Gee, 1998, 2004; Grenfell, 2012; Jones, Turner & Street, 1999; Lea & Stierer, 2000; Lea & Street, 1998, 2006; Leung & Street, 2012; Monroe, 2006; Street, 2009, 2013; Wingate & Tribble, 2012). From academic writing in composition classes to writing across disciplines (Young, 1999) to English for academic purposes and ESL (Cumming, 1998, 2006), the field has also focused on academic writing as social practice (Ivanič, 1998) and considered the link between writing and identity, sense of belonging and literacy (Marshall, Zhou, Gervan & Wiebe, 2012), the sociolinguistics of writing, including writing and the transition to postsecondary education, as well as the link between academic writing and the professions (Jones, Turner & Street, 1999; Lillis, 2003; Lillis & Rai, 2012; Lillis & Turner, 2001; Marshall, 2012). Studies such as Russell (2005) make explicit what counts as good academic writing. Much of this research has helped shape a new perspective on student writing in academia, one that aims to go beyond a view of the student as constantly deficient.

As Ivanič (1998) states:

Academic literacy is not a neutral, unproblematic skill which students simply have to acquire, but multiple, complex and contested set of social practices which should be given more explicit and critical attention by all members of the academic community. (p. 109)

In this view, academic literacies are social practices situated within the context of a particular academic community, yet they also transcend the local to partake of the wider academic community. As a result, one must pay particular attention to what Pennycook (2010) refers to as the “local practices” of language,

including language register⁵, norms and culturally embedded references. Student writing centers are increasingly becoming the object of study (Barkas, 2011), as are students' writing skills and competencies, not only as they transition to PSE but also as they move from PSE to the workforce.

Over the last two decades, considerable research in the field of study of postsecondary or academic literacy has also been completed within francophone academic communities, particularly in Belgium and France. Interestingly, much of the work of academics such as Blaser and Pollet (2010), Defays (2006), Leclercq (2003), Parmentier (2011) and Pollet (2012a,b), for example, are rarely if ever mentioned or cited in most English-dominant literature, and vice versa. In the francophone studies, much of the recent work are tied to what Coulon (2005) describes as students "learning to become university students." The French language makes a distinction between "élève", a student at the elementary or secondary school level, and "étudiant", a PSE student. Coulon (2005) argues that as they transition to PSE, secondary school students must acquire the skills and literacies associated with their new status as PSE students and that the appropriation of said literacies constitutes the first step towards the students' eventual integration into their chosen profession. Within the francophone literature, we note an evolution similar to that in the Anglo-Saxon canon, of studies that explore not only the literacy gaps experienced by local (i.e., national) students transitioning to PSE, but also how the internationalization of universities is opening new discursive and reflexive spaces for addressing the academic literacy needs of all students (Parmentier, 2011), including international students and graduate students.

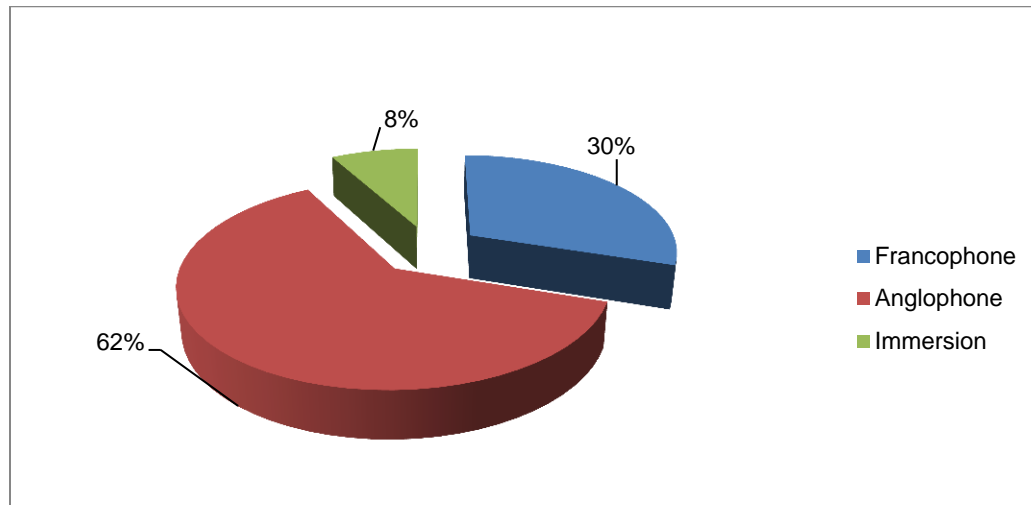
Context

The University of Ottawa is North America's largest bilingual postsecondary institution. Total undergraduate and graduate enrolment at the university in 2012 surpassed 42,000 students, of which about one-third were registered in French programs, as demonstrated in Figure 1. Moreover, students registered in the university's French Immersion program⁶ also register in at least two classes taught in French per semester, where they study alongside francophone students.

⁵ A language register is a variety of language used in a specific social context or a particular setting. For example, George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion*, and its film adaptation, *My Fair Lady*, both highlight different registers of language associated with particular socioeconomic contexts.

⁶ To be eligible for admission into the French Immersion stream, students must have studied French as a second language in secondary school and must pass a French language test at the University of Ottawa's Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute (OLBI). The French immersion stream is available in a total of 76 programs offered by the Faculties of Arts, Social Sciences, Health Sciences, Sciences, Engineering and Telfer School of Management. Students must complete at least 42 credits in discipline courses taught in French and earn the University of Ottawa's Second Language Certificate. Students in the French Immersion stream in the Faculties of Arts, Social Sciences, Health Sciences and Telfer School of Management are provided with sheltered courses in their discipline for courses taken in French at the 1000 and 2000 levels. In these courses, language teachers review the course material and ensure understanding of course vocabulary and concepts, while developing students' French language skills.

Figure 1: Undergraduate Enrolment Program Language of Instruction, Fall 2012 Cohort



The University of Ottawa welcomes students from many education jurisdictions and pathways into each of its programs, as demonstrated in Figures 2 and 3. As Arnold, Motte and DeClou (2013) highlight, and as had been earlier reported by Cardinal, Charbonneau and Desabrais (2011), defining who is a Francophone can be challenging, as graduates of French-language secondary schools do not all choose to study in French programs in PSE and not everyone who registers in a French program in PSE identifies with the francophone community or self-identifies as a Francophone. Regardless of how one chooses to define the francophone student population, the University of Ottawa’s charter outlines its mandate to meet the needs of Ontario’s French first-language minority community.

Figure 2: Distribution by Entry Pathway of First-Year Students in English Programs, Fall 2012 Cohort

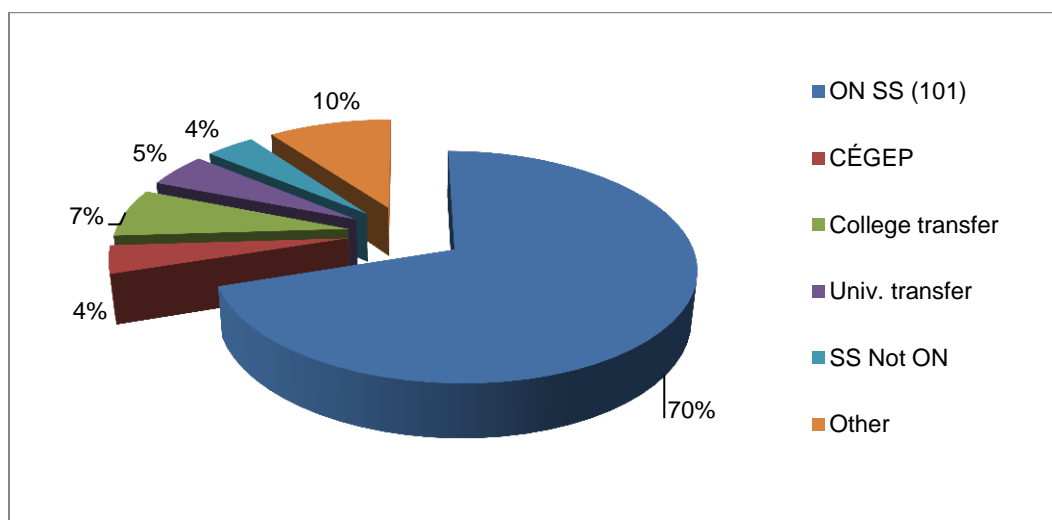
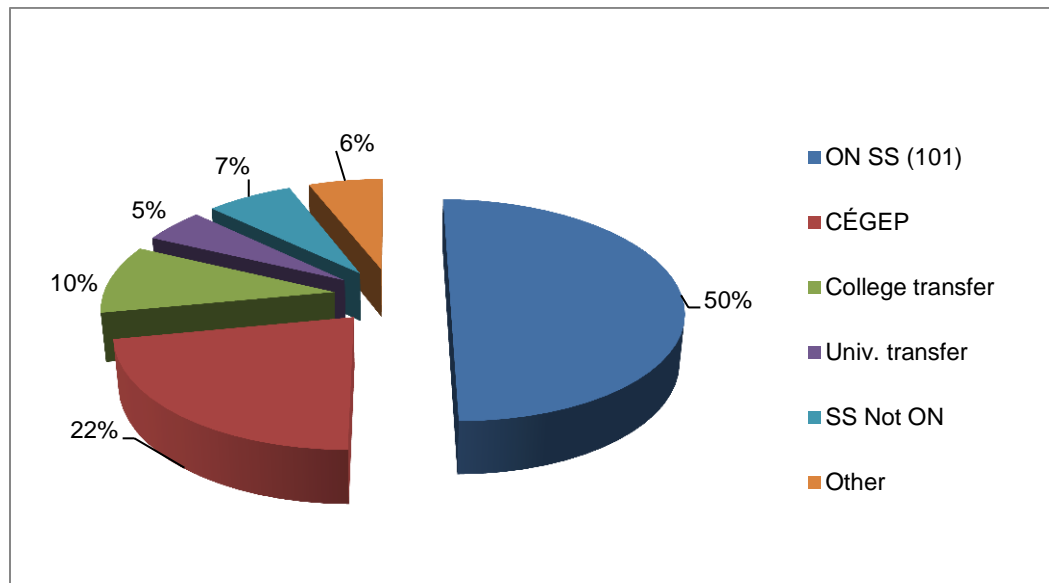


Figure 3: Distribution by Entry Pathway of First-Year Students in Francophone Programs, Fall 2012 Cohort

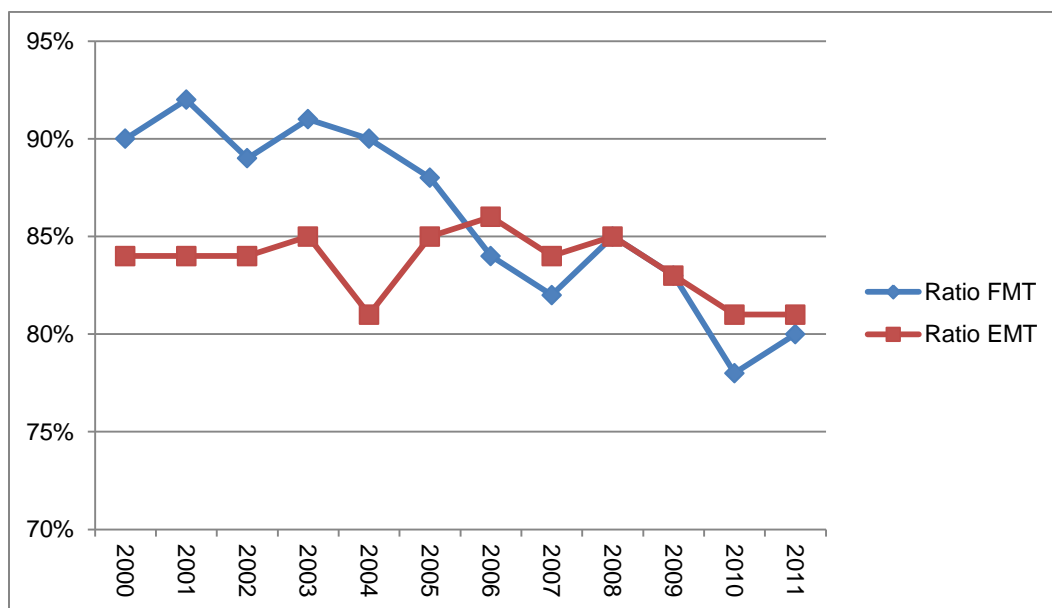


A closer look at the University of Ottawa’s admission data since 2000 reveals increasing linguistic diversity in the undergraduate cohort from Ontario secondary schools, as demonstrated in Figure 4. We can clearly note a decrease in francophone students who identify French as their mother tongue between 2000 (90%) and 2011 (80%). Although there is greater variance, there seems to be a similar trend in the anglophone⁷ cohort as well.

The vast majority of the university’s undergraduate programs do not require language testing as an admission requirement for Ontario students. In a few, highly selective programs, such as Second Language Teaching (DLS), *Formation à l’enseignement* (the French first-language pre-service teacher education program (BEd) and Nutrition (which is offered only in French), students have to demonstrate mastery of both French and English language skills. Students in the university’s French Immersion program must also meet minimal language requirements in French to be admitted to the French Immersion component of their undergraduate program.

⁷ Students who register in the French Immersion Regime at the University of Ottawa register in English programs and are counted in the anglophone cohort, although they do take classes taught in French. Their mandatory foundation courses must be completed in English.

Figure 4: Ratio of Direct-Entry First-Year Registered Students from Ontario by Mother Tongue (FMT= French Mother Tongue, EMT= English Mother Tongue), Cohorts 2000-2011



Furthermore, the vast majority of social sciences and humanities programs have only one entrance requirement: the grade 12 pre-university language course in the language in which students intend to study at university. For admission, students must possess a minimum overall average that is calculated using the mandatory language requirement and five other grade 12 pre-university courses. Different programs can have different minimum admission averages and meeting the minimum admission average does not guarantee admission. Furthermore, there is no minimum average required specifically for the grade 12 language course other than a pass. It is the combined average of the six courses that forms the basis for an offer of admission. A student could meet the admission requirement while having a low but passing grade in the grade 12 language course that is offset in the admission average by high marks in the other five classes. The Ontario government has established provincial standards for success and, as stated in the *Growing Success* policy document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010):

Level 3 represents the provincial standard for achievement. The student demonstrates the specified knowledge and skills with considerable effectiveness. Parents of students achieving at level 3 can be confident that their children will be prepared for work in subsequent grades/courses. (p. 18)

For secondary school students, level 3 translates to a grade between 70% and 79%. In Ontario, a passing grade is 50%, which represents level 1 in the provincial assessment rubric of four levels.

As part of a study on the peer mentoring initiative at the University of Ottawa, Lamoureux et al. (2013) analyzed midterm marks in FRA1710 from the fall of 2011 to determine whether the language difficulties that students had reported qualitatively could be substantiated quantitatively. Results indicated that several francophone students from Ontario were at risk of failing their first foundational language course at the University of Ottawa, despite having met or surpassed the provincial standard (level 3, 70-79%) in their grade

12 *Français préuniversitaire* (FRA4U) course. The regional peer mentors⁸ assigned to these students would later request that the university create a new language course to assist prospective students like them and their mentees bridge the gap between the literacy requirements in secondary school and those in university.

The study also demonstrated the significance of students' school board of origin and grades in the mandatory grade 12 pre-university language course (FRA4U or ENG4U⁹) as variables linked to student academic performance in first-year university foundational language courses and across all courses, for students in French and English programs. Figures 5 and 6 plot students' grade point average (GPA)¹⁰ at the end of the fall session (y-axis) and their FRA4U (Figure 5) or ENG4U (Figure 6) marks (x-axis). One can clearly see that the majority of students who enter university with a mark of less than 70% in their prerequisite grade 12 language course have a lower GPA after one semester in university, with many being in the range the institution considers "at risk" of not progressing through their degree. At the University of Ottawa, students who have a CGPA of 3.5 to 4.4 are considered at risk academically, whereas students with a CGPA of less than 3.4 are considered at high academic risk.

⁸ The Regional Peer Mentoring Initiative was set up by the University of Ottawa in 2011-2012 to help francophone students transition from outside the Ottawa/Eastern Ontario region transition to the institution. Focus groups and student performance data revealed that students from these areas had a lower persistence rate than their francophone peers from the Ottawa region, which was in turn lower than that of their anglophone peers. The initiative was the focus of a HEQCO-funded study (Lamoureux et al., 2013). The study confirmed that students from these areas experienced heightened linguistic insecurity. The study participants reported that the two foundational language courses, FRA1710 and FRA1720, did not help them bridge what they perceived to be a gap between the literacy skills developed in secondary school and those required for university-level study in French programs. The study identified the result in the grade 12 language prerequisite (FRA4U, ENG4U) as the most important independent variable among those tested, affecting students' GPA at the end of year one, accounting for almost as much variance as the complete admission average.

⁹ Generally, students pursuing PSE in French-medium-of-instruction programs in Ontario have FRA4U or its equivalent as a language admission requirement, whereas students in English-medium-of-instruction programs have ENG4U or EAE4U as a language admission requirement.

¹⁰ At the University of Ottawa, the GPA and CGPA are calculated on a 10-point scale, as demonstrated below:

A+	10	90-100%
A	9	85-89%
A-	8	80-84%
B+	7	75-79%
B	6	70-74%
C+	5	65-69%
C	4	60-64%
D+	3	55-59%
D	2	50-54%
E	1	40-49%
F	0	0-39%

Figure 5: Line Fit Plot of Student GPA after 1 Session and FRA4U Final Grade (2008-2012)

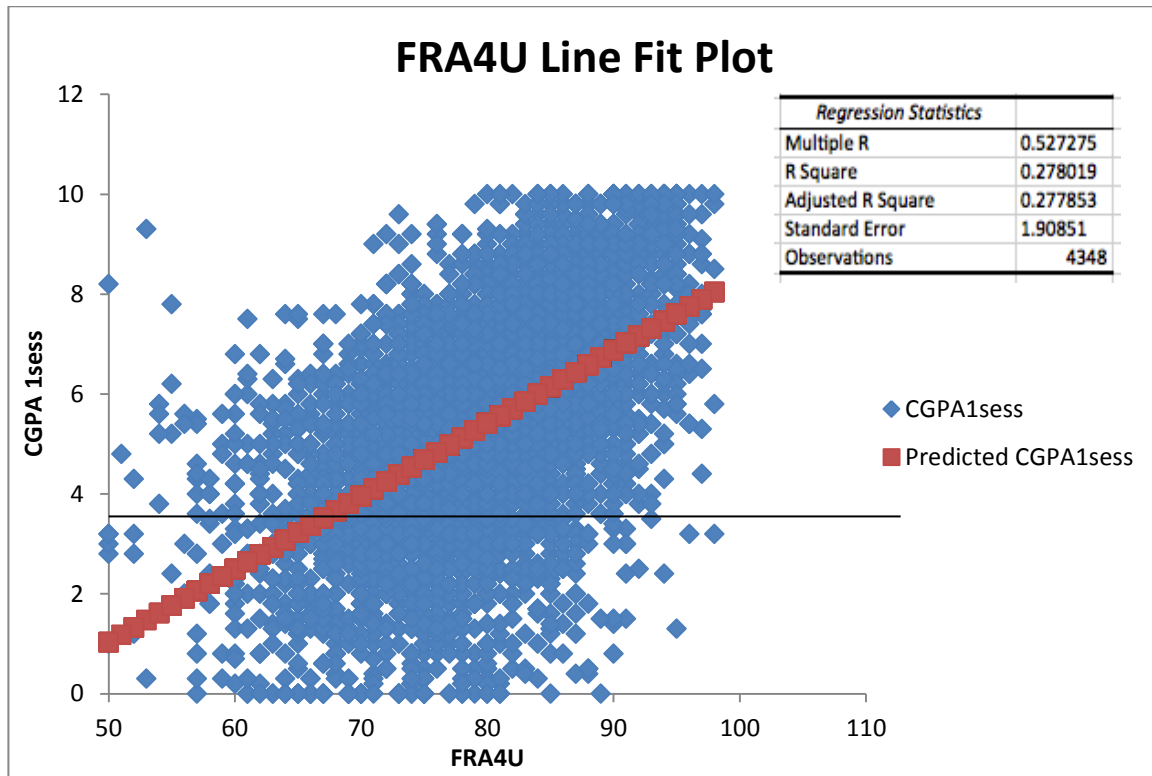
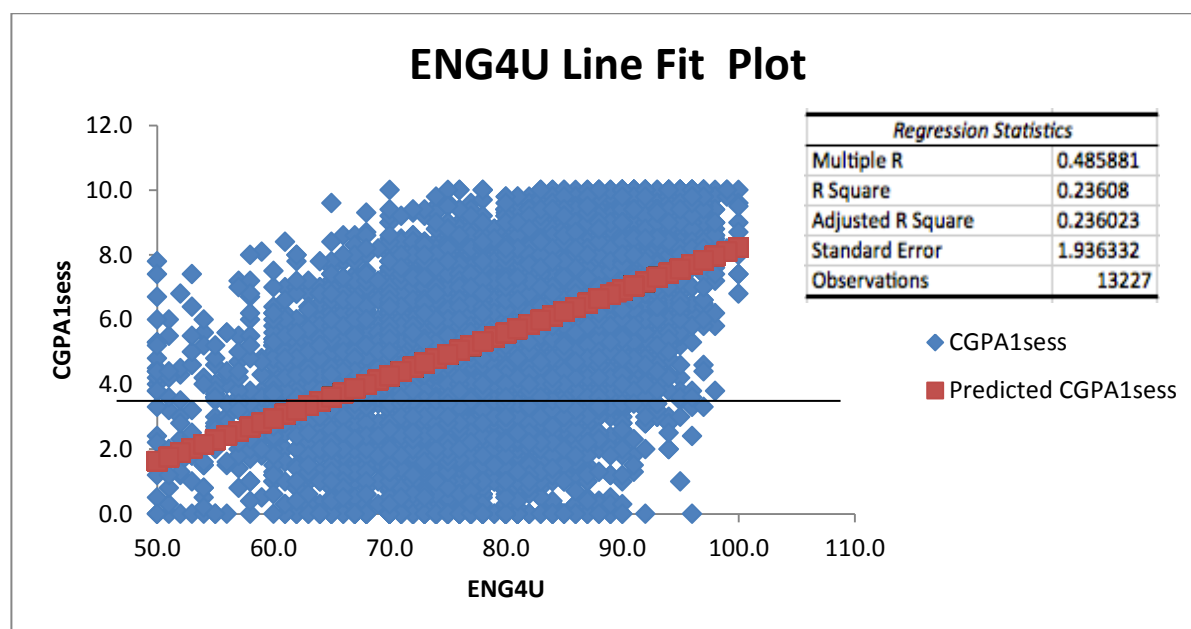


Figure 6: Line Fit Plot of Student CGPA after 1 Session and ENG4U Final Grade (2008-2012)



Furthermore, focus groups conducted between 2010 and 2012 with more than 400 University of Ottawa students from a variety of Ontario’s French first-language school boards in northern and central southwestern Ontario and who were studying in French at the university revealed what students identified as a literacy “gap” between the skills and competencies acquired in secondary school language classes and the skills and competencies required for success in university, particularly as it applies to writing in courses offered in French (Lamoureux et al., 2013). These bilingual and plurilingual youth identified significant differences between the language variety and registers used in their home schools and communities and the register and variety of French expected and valued in a bilingual university setting. For many students who are from regions where less than 2% of the population speaks French, the University of Ottawa is their first experience of a bilingual setting where the French language can be used in all aspects of student life and daily interaction.

This particular finding calls to mind the research of Kanno and Harklau (2012) who examine student preparation for university-level literacy in an increasingly plurilingual world, for both English language learners and multilingual Americans (1.5- and second-generation immigrants), and who document the realities that plurilingual youth face when confronted with the expectations of a monolingual institution. Although the University of Ottawa is bilingual, many students’ experience of bilingualism within the institution and the expectations around language competency are situated ideologically in a conceptualization of bilingualism as two separate monolingualisms (Heller, 1999; Lamoureux, 2007).

Study Design

A mixed method study was designed to document the process, experience and outcomes of the creation and implementation of FRA1705, from student recruitment to the course’s impact on students’ marks in other

courses, to assessment of pedagogical aims and practices. The academic performance of the students in FRA1705 was also compared to that of a comparison group of similar Ontario francophone students who did not register for the course.

Four research questions, which explored the project from various perspectives, guided our work:

1. What do **students perceive** to be the impact of FRA1705 on their grades in their classes taught in French?
2. How do **students perceive** the impact of FRA1705 on their first-year experience, including the transition to PSE?
3. What do the **course facilitators and designers perceive** to be the impact of FRA1705 on students' academic performance?
4. What is the actual **impact** of participation in FRA1705 on **students' academic performance** in foundation language courses, in their other courses taught in French and on their GPA?

The first three research questions were evaluated based on data collected through observation, interviews, focus groups and surveys with students, course facilitators and course designers. Evaluation of the fourth question was based on analysis of students' grades and GPA (session 1, end of year 1) during the first year of study at the University of Ottawa.

To establish the students' perspective, two focus groups and three online surveys were conducted with the students registered in FRA1705, a three-credit course taught over two semesters at 90 minutes per week. The first survey was administered just before the first class in order to establish the students' expectations for this new course, offered as a pilot study. The first and second focus groups occurred in late November and mid-March, at the same time as the second and third surveys. At the end of March, a focus group was also conducted with students identified as being part of the comparison group through propensity score matching.

To establish the instructors' and pedagogical support team's perspective, a focus group was conducted with the pedagogical support team and individual interviews were conducted with each of the three instructors who taught FRA1705. Interestingly, one of the FRA1705 section professors also taught sections of the two foundational language courses, FRA1710 and FRA1720; this experience provided an analytical vantage point for perceptions of student improvement and success.

The principal investigator and her undergraduate research assistant met with the pedagogical support team, the instructors and all of the FRA1705 students to explain the parameters of the study as well as the data collection process. The principal investigator informed all students that anonymized feedback collected through focus groups and surveys would be shared with the pedagogical team and instructors in a timely manner to allow for on-going course improvement to meet students' needs. Ethics approval to invite course participants into the study was obtained in September 2012, and informed consent was obtained from participants at all data collection events (surveys, focus groups and interviews).

Setting the Stage: Creating FRA1705

As previously stated, in February 2012 student mentors requested a meeting with the Registrar's Office, as well as the associate vice-president academic, to identify a solution that could improve retention and student success in French programs at the University of Ottawa. Their suggestions were taken up by the associate vice-president academic, who immediately struck a steering committee composed of the two associate registrars, two professors from the *Département de français*, the lead investigator for the peer mentoring

project (a professor at the Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute (OLBI)), and two professors from the Faculty of Education to explore various solutions. It was decided that a new optional *Français* course would be piloted and that its impact on student success would be studied. The pilot project would be documented, from the course development process to the actual experiences in the course of students, the course instructors and the pedagogical support team.

The new three-credit course, FRA1705 *Perfectionnement du français*, would be offered over two semesters, concurrent with the mandatory language foundation courses (FRA1710 and FRA1720). As such, it was never designed to be a prerequisite to FRA1710 but would instead focus on the needs identified by students, such as syntax, anglicisms, editing, grammar, and clarity.¹¹

The course was proposed to and accepted by the University of Ottawa senate as a pilot study. Students admitted to the university's French-language programs in the Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences would be invited to write a language proficiency placement test, developed and administered electronically by the OLBI, to determine if their writing reflected what is considered to be adequate university level literacy, that is, containing complex sentence structures, clarity, coherence, rich vocabulary and correct grammar, punctuation and syntax. The non-binding test consisted of a 200-word writing sample, to be completed in 40 minutes and based on a prompt. Each writing sample was assessed independently and holistically by three raters: the professor in the *Département de français* in charge of FRA1710 and two professors from the Faculty of Education who were responsible for the language admission tests for future teachers of French (FSL and first-language), all specialists in language acquisition, writing and language pedagogy. The writing assessment could yield one of three possible recommendations:

1. The sample meets university-level literacy requirements and the student would not benefit from taking FRA1705;
2. The sample meets some university-level literacy requirements and the student could benefit from taking FRA1705; or
3. The sample does not meet university-level literacy requirements and the student will benefit from taking FRA1705.

The three assessors would share their recommendations and comments on the writing samples to ensure unanimous consensus on the final recommendation for the sample. These discussions also ensured inter-rater reliability. Given that the course was offered as a pilot study, the writing assessment recommendations were not binding. Students who received recommendations 2 and 3 were free to opt in or opt out of the course. However, students who were deemed to have met university-level literacy requirements could not register for the course.

Students interested in FRA1705 filled out a registration form to register for the course in one of four sections, which were limited to 30 students each since registration for the course had to be handled manually. Once the results of the placement test were disclosed, students who did not need the course were automatically de-enrolled. Students could drop the course electronically but could not register for the course or make changes to their schedule without assistance as, for several students, FRA1705 was an eleventh course. It was offered weekly for 90 minutes over both semesters.

¹¹ Syntax, although a component of grammar, refers specifically to the relationship of words in a sentence and their order (placement). French sentence structure is different than English sentence structure. Poor syntax may impact sense and clarity. Anglicisms include using an English word, structure, expression or meaning in a French sentence. It also includes false cognates.

The course was developed in the spring and summer of 2012 by a pedagogical team of three professors, made up of a professor from the Faculty of Education, the professor responsible for FRA1710 as well as a lecturer from the Faculty of Education. This team was responsible for the assessment of the writing sample and the development of the course based on the error types and literacy needs identified through the analysis of the writing samples. The team based the course on collaborative planning and developed training for the instructors of FRA1705. It was anticipated that 10% of Ontario students in the francophone cohort would register in one of the four sections of the FRA1705 course, although analysis in the Lamoureux et al. (2013; Figure 4, pg. 8) study suggests that about 50% of the cohort could benefit from the course. Although 75 students were registered in the course at the start of the academic year, only 69 continued over two semesters, which represented 7% of the incoming Ontario francophone cohort at the University of Ottawa.

Because this was a new course that was not advertised in the course calendar, the liaison office communicated with guidance counsellors at all Ontario and New Brunswick French first-language secondary schools to inform them about the new course, the target clientele (students who perform at level 3 or below according to Ontario curriculum standards) and the registration modalities. The student mentors and liaison officers also promoted the course as one created to meet student demand during the early spring registration workshops held in French language secondary schools across Ontario and New Brunswick.

Collaborative Planning

Course Development Committee

Following the initial steering committee meeting, the course development committee began its work. Meetings were held regularly between April and August 2012, with three key individuals in attendance: a professor of the *Département de français*, and both a professor and a lecturer from the Faculty of Education. From the outset, the spirit of collaboration, central to the course's success, guided their work.

The first few meetings focused on the conceptualization of the course, for which no model or template existed. It was decided that the content would be presented using an approach focused on the writing process (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Grabe, 2001; Hayes, 1996; Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2007) and that producing different types of written work would help students improve their writing skills and develop new writing strategies. The committee decided to establish a progression based on the different genres of texts students would write (contextualized writing tasks, guided, autonomous, etc.) and the different registers of language (e.g., execute the same writing task first in a familiar register and in a formal register) (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2007). Conscious of staying true to the approach in which the course was created, the committee carefully developed the pedagogical support documents to be used in the course to ensure that all session instructors would share the same interpretation of the vision, as well as the same pedagogical approaches and instructional language (e.g., writing process, reflexive writing, feedback, enrichment activity, peer assessment, etc.). Furthermore, great effort was made to ensure that the writing contexts and tasks reflected students' new university reality (e.g., requesting permission from the department chair to participate in a foreign exchange).

After having clearly defined the course's approach, the committee set the general content for each of the 24 weekly 90-minute classes, the assignments, the midterm and the final assessment. These reflections led to the creation of a common course outline for all sections, as well as an instructor's guide. This guide was meant to ensure that there would be a certain level of uniformity among the four course sections and was divided into five parts: presentation of the course and its objectives; the pedagogical foundations; a description of the assessments; a description of the writing tasks; the detailed content for each class.

Following the production of the instructor's guide¹² and the recruitment of the three instructors for the four course sections, the writing committee invited the instructors to join them for bi-weekly harmonization meetings. This new committee became the course's pedagogical team.

Pedagogical Team Meetings: Ensuring a Shared Vision and Practice

The pedagogical team worked collaboratively throughout the year, from August 2012 to April 2013. The purpose of the first meeting was to ensure that the course instructors clearly understood the needs of the students registered in FRA1705, the course objectives as well as the pedagogical approach that would be favoured. There was much discussion about the fact that the FRA1705 course was developed at the request of students from francophone minority communities, who had identified specific needs to bridge the gap between the writing requirements in secondary school and those at university. Registration in the course was thus limited to first-year francophone students in arts and social science programs, who hailed from regions where the French language was in a minority context and who would be concurrently registered during the year in FRA1705, as well as the two foundational language courses, FRA1710 and FRA1720.

Furthermore, the instructors were informed about the linguistic insecurities that students from these regions experienced at the University of Ottawa and the types of support they would need. During the initial meeting, members discussed the overarching course objectives:

- 1) To instill in students a sense of questioning about the functions of language;
- 2) To help students become more autonomous in the use of tools to edit their texts in order to develop university-level literacy competencies and skills.

There was a need to make it very clear that, unlike certain other foundational language courses or traditional upgrading courses, FRA1705 would not be based on a grammatical approach. The course would follow an approach based on the writing process, in which the writer is called upon to be reflexive of their writing decisions, to write for different audiences (not just the professor) and to edit their work (with tools, with peers, etc.) (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2007).

As a result of this decision, the pedagogical team entered into a dialogue about the role and place of grammar within the course. It was decided that grammatical concepts would be addressed through real, contextualized writing situations, following both an inductive and reflexive approach (Beacco, 2010). In fact, students were instructed to reflect on and correct their errors during the writing process using a variety of tools (dictionaries, the Antidote software, peer review) with which they were familiarized during the course.

To ensure uniformity across the four course sections, it was deemed essential that all members of the pedagogical team participate in the harmonization meetings, scheduled every two weeks over both terms. During these meetings, members of the pedagogical team would discuss how the course was unfolding and any differences between planned and delivered instruction. They would also find solutions to a variety of problems that had arisen (logistics, pedagogy), create assessment grids, discuss work to be assessed, and exchange thoughts on the students' challenges. They would create and adapt pedagogical strategies based on students' needs and plan the detailed course content and assessments for the coming week based on the discussions. This work was done through discussion to achieve consensus. The primary investigator would occasionally observe these meetings. Relevant information collected from students through the focus groups

¹² For information regarding FRA1705, please contact the University of Ottawa's Département de français at departementdefrancais@uottawa.ca.

and surveys was also shared with the team in a timely fashion to allow them to adapt the course, ensuring that students' needs were being met and that various aspects of the course would be improved.

Furthermore, these harmonization meetings also reassured the section instructors, who reported experiencing a sense of professional insecurity due in part to the experimental nature of the course and the fact that they were implementing new, unfamiliar pedagogies. Their sense of insecurity dissipated throughout the year and was replaced with newfound confidence based on a deeper understanding of their students and their needs. The last team meeting in April 2013 allowed for an analysis of the year as a whole. This meeting also provided the opportunity to review the course outline and detailed planning based on student progress and results, and to make recommendations to the steering committee for possible improvements to the course in the future.

Recruiting Students

Thanks to the outstanding marketing work of the regional mentors and liaison officers, as well as word-of-mouth recommendations from students who experienced difficulties the previous year in FRA1710 and FRA1720, more than 200 students demonstrated an interest in FRA 1705; however, students registered in faculties other than arts and social science were excluded from the pilot study due to limited space. As such, 136 students completed the test. Of these, 13 writing samples were deemed to meet university level-literacy requirements, whereas 17 samples indicated that their author could benefit from registering in the course. A total of 106 samples demonstrated a significant gap with respect to university-level literacy requirements. Of these, 61 students completed the course, along with eight of the 17 students whose work demonstrated that they could benefit from the course. It should be noted that scheduling conflicts prevented many students from registering in this new course.

Findings/Results

A) From the Students' Perspective: Expectations to Impressions to Verdict

Although FRA1705 was open to students from Ontario and New Brunswick, the majority of students (59 out of 69) came from Ontario. These students also represented the majority of survey respondents: 93% for each of the three surveys. There were 30 respondents to the first survey, 32 to the second survey and only 15 to the third survey. At the University of Ottawa Ontario direct-entry students make up 50% of the francophone first-year cohort whereas francophone students from New Brunswick represent less than half of the out-of-province grade 12 direct-entry students, or about 3% of the cohort (Lamoureux et al., 2013). Student characteristics (Ontario only) are presented in Table 1.

Initial Survey – August 2012

The initial survey generated elements of the linguistic biography of the respondents, who were all graduates of French first-language secondary schools in a minority context. The vast majority of respondents (96.4%) had at least one parent who can speak French, whereas only 32% of respondents indicated that they communicated regularly in French with their friends. Interestingly, only 10% indicated having read in French during the summer and 46% indicated having spoken some French during the summer. Perhaps the most

significant finding of this initial survey is that only 18% of respondents felt ready for university-level writing, with 51% indicating that they felt EAE4U¹³, the grade 12 pre-university English course (equivalent to ENG4U in English schools), had prepared them for university literacy requirements; 41% felt that FRA4U (or their grade 12 pre-university *Français* class) had prepared them for university literacy requirements. All respondents were registered in French programs at the university and took at least 60% of their course load in French during their first year. The majority of respondents (81%) felt that they had achieved success in FRA4U and that their mark in that prerequisite course reflected their abilities and competencies.

Overwhelmingly, the students found out about FRA1705 from their regional mentors and liaison officers during the in-school registration visits, while a few were advised by their guidance counsellors to take advantage of this new course. Most students were hoping that the course would help them bridge the gap between the linguistic register they used in secondary school and the more formal one they expected to be valued in university. All respondents agreed that they had to improve their language competencies, including their capacity to detect and correct anglicisms in their vocabulary and syntax.

Second Survey – November 2012

At the end of the first semester, 64% of respondents felt that FRA1705 was meeting their expectations. This number was surprisingly low, given that the course content had been adapted to past students' reported difficulties. Closer inspection of student explanations revealed that 90% of them had no clear expectations going into the course and that they were pleased with how things were going thus far. However, 10% of respondents indicated being somewhat dissatisfied with the timing of the course content delivery. These same respondents also reported wanting more intensive and complex subject matter instruction.

Although all of the respondents indicated that they appreciated the practical nature of the course and found it useful, only 45.8% of respondents indicated that FRA1705 was useful for their work in other FRA classes, and 45.8% indicated that it was useful for their other classes taught in French. Once again, closer inspection of open responses reveals that students had surprisingly little writing to do in the majority of their courses during the first semester and were confronted instead primarily with multiple-choice midterms and exams.

Students identified some areas of improvement for the course content. They indicated wanting additional training for the proofreading software *Antidote*, with which they were provided for free upon registering in the course, as well as more information about the details of different types of texts and writing for various audiences. They also wanted more information about essay writing, as this was not covered in FRA1710. Finally, many students wished the course was offered during one semester only, with clearly defined weekly topics and monthly recaps, to provide a spiral learning approach to help with “scaffolding new learning.”

First Focus Group – November 2012

The first focus group attracted more participants than expected, so students were divided into two groups (20 participants in total). Discussions confirmed many of the comments participants had provided in the open responses to the first and second surveys. Most participants were still experiencing shock at the great number of points being deducted on assignments in some classes for language-related errors. Students indicated that they enjoyed the focus on writing production and language registers that was provided in FRA1705. They especially appreciated discussions of the vocabulary associated with university life and of the etiquette for

¹³ Analysis of student admission data confirms that 51 out of the 59 Ontario students completed EAE4U and FRA4U in secondary school. The student information system does not have as detailed data for out-of-province students.

emailing professors, academic advisors and teaching assistants, which explained the appropriateness of vocabulary based on the required register.

All participants agreed that the university should make this course mandatory, with provisions for exclusion based on proven competency through a placement test. They suggested grouping students into sections based on types of need (anglicism, grammar, vocabulary, etc.) identified in the writing test and that students be allowed to choose between a semester-long and a year-long course offering. Furthermore, they agreed that they had improved their literacy skills, not only as they pertained to writing but also to oral communication. They felt that they were overcoming their linguistic insecurity by becoming more autonomous and confident in applying their language competencies to correct their own work. They felt that the course had helped them integrate socially into their new academic community. The small class size was a welcome change from the larger first-year courses and allowed them to get to know other students.

All participants had a positive outlook on their university experience to date, despite identifying challenges in other courses or with respect to university administrative rules. They identified the peer mentoring program and FRA1705 as being responsible for their successful integration into university life, even though time management was still a challenge for many.

The second focus group (March 2013) and third survey were less successful at recruiting participants. In all, only seven students participated in the second focus group and 15 completed the third survey.

Third Survey – March 2013

In the final survey, 33% of students stated that the course met or exceeded their expectations. As with the second survey, more than half of the 40% of students who answered negatively to this question (“No, the course did not meet my expectations”) then explained that they had not had any expectations going into the course but that they enjoyed the course. One-third of respondents felt that the course was helpful not only for the other FRA courses but also for their other courses taught in French. Again, the majority of students stated that they had few writing requirements in their other courses aside from midterms and exams, but that they felt more confident in the short answer portion of midterms thanks to FRA1705.

All of the respondents appreciated receiving a free copy of Antidote and felt that it was a truly essential tool in the writing process. However, most students only used part of the software, the corrector, and had yet to use the other components, such as the syntax help, dictionaries and text analysis tools. More than 70% of respondents felt that they had greatly improved their writing competency and literacy skills because of FRA1705 and reported feeling more at ease and more confident when writing in French for academic purposes.

The most valued learning outcomes in FRA1705 were learning more about appropriate use of language register and how to avoid anglicisms. However, students would have appreciated more intensive instruction about formal register transitions and link words, complex grammatical rules and how to use the other components in Antidote. Students reiterated the need to be able to choose whether they would like to take the course over one or two semesters, but felt that the course should continue to be offered. They also suggested that groupings be based on need, as determined by the types of errors made in the placement test.

Second Focus Group – March 2013

The second focus group was quite interesting, as two of the seven participants reported what initially appeared to be strong discontent with the course. However, over the course of the two-hour focus group

session, the researcher present came to recognize that despite some of their expectations not being met in the course (e.g., increasing the difficulty in content matter, moving at faster pace), the students were most convincing as to the necessity of continuing to offer FRA1705 in the future.

Participants emphasized the importance of writing clearly and of selecting the most appropriate words when writing in courses taught in French at the university. As a student explained, it is not just a question of choosing a word, a synonym; it is finding the word that conveys the exact meaning in a certain context and register, according to disciplinary norms. All participants appreciated the fact that there was a direct link between what they were taught in FRA1705, what was evaluated in that course and the skills that were required in most other courses taught in French at the university. They all felt more confident, autonomous and able to edit their own work based on disciplinary expectations in light of their knowledge of language registers. The participants reported feeling linguistically secure. They commended the instructors who shared personal tips and tricks for remembering how and why to apply certain grammatical rules, and wished that this had been done in all sections.

All participants, but particularly the two who at first seemed disappointed in the course, wished that the course would go further in addressing more complex grammatical issues in context. However, they all recognized that for some of their classmates, it would have been too much. They raised the question of grouping the sections based on the types of mistakes made in their placement test, to allow all students to improve as much as possible.

Although they were satisfied with the FRA1705 course, participants reported that syntax, juxtaposition, pronominal verbs and clarity still posed challenges when writing in French. However, they were quick to add that these elements posed greater challenges when there was little pedagogical transparency concerning how assignments would be marked or what professors in other courses expected from them. All participants reported having received what they deem to be harsh comments from francophone professors in other courses regarding their writing proficiency, including during the second semester. Two reported being told by professors of other courses to switch to English programs.

All participants suggested that FRA1705 be designated the one mandatory French foundational language course for arts and social science students in particular, and all students in general, with the provision that exclusions could be granted based on the results of a placement test. Finally, they recommended that, in the future, FRA1705 include more explicit teaching on different types of texts earlier in the course. They also recommended that the second foundational language course be a literature course. All participants concurred that FRA1705 better prepared them for writing at university than the two existing foundational French language courses, FRA1710 and FRA1720.

Comparison Group: Focus Group

Interestingly, during the focus group with the comparison group, the participants also confirmed that there was less writing than anticipated in many of their courses during the fall semester but were surprised at the number of marks one could lose due to writing difficulties in the few written assignments they had and in the writing components of midterms and finals. As they did not have many opportunities to write during the year, they felt a lot of pressure to write clearly during midterms and exams.

The students in the comparison group felt that the two foundational French language courses they did take (FRA1710 and FRA1720) did not address the types of writing they had to do in other university courses and did not help them with their writing difficulties pertaining to syntax, anglicisms and the ability to edit their work with confidence. They all noted speaking more often in French since they had moved to Ottawa and noticed

that their spoken French had improved. However, they had not noticed any improvements in their writing and reported feeling a sense of insecurity about academic writing in French.

B) From the Pedagogical Support Team and Instructors' Perspectives

All three of the section instructors appreciated having had the opportunity to analyze the writing samples of their students who had completed the placement test. This allowed them to quickly take into account the diversity of student needs with respect to writing. Two instructors were not fluently bilingual (French-English) and were not aware of the extent to which students from areas in which French is in a minority context imported English expressions into their written and spoken French. They appreciated how their colleagues from the pedagogical team helped situate them regarding the sociolinguistic and sociopolitical realities of Francophones who live a minority context in Canada.

For both the pedagogical support team and the section instructors, FRA1705 was their first experience in truly collaborative planning. They all appreciated the opportunities created by developing materials and sharing pedagogical strategies, techniques and even helpful tips to share with students. This process is quite different from the way multiple-section courses are usually run, where a common course plan is then interpreted differently by each section professor. Although the team meetings required an additional time investment, all agreed that this was not only in the best interest of the students but also of themselves, as it allowed for pedagogical discussions about how best to teach mastery of different elements of writing.

The three section instructors were quick to note the high level of linguistic insecurity of their students at the outset of the course. As one instructor stated, "I really wanted to congratulate them on their initiative for taking the course, for wanting to improve their literacy skills, for valuing their success. I could feel their motivation for improving." Or, as another stated, "For the first time, I became more conscious of the weight of what I'm teaching and its impact beyond my classroom." They all felt that their role as instructors for this course was, as one instructor stated, "to get the students to be more autonomous, reflective writers, who think about their choices."

Teaching the course had a profound impact on at least two of the session instructors, who no longer approach their other courses in the same way. They look differently at what they teach and how they teach it, to ensure students' deep understanding not only of concepts but of when and how to apply them.

All instructors agreed that their students demonstrated great progress throughout the course and that they could see the improvements in student writing, as well as in their confidence as writers. However, they agreed that should the course continue, it would be important to find a way to group students according to the needs demonstrated in the placement test. This would allow the instructors to work more efficiently with all students. The writing challenges that instructors identified most frequently in FRA1075 students included: mastering the differences in register, lack of specialized vocabulary (particularly at the formal register), anglicisms and syntax.

The pedagogical support team and the section instructors were convinced that part of the impact of the course for students was linked to the collaborative approach taken during course development and the quality of pedagogical exchanges to find the best strategies to help students improve. They hoped to continue with this approach for 2013-2014.

Finally, the section instructor who also taught FRA1710 and FRA1720 could see the impact that FRA1705 had for those students also registered in her foundational language courses. She felt that the university

needed to have more alternatives in its selection of foundational courses, to be able to direct students to the courses they need and thus improve their overall academic success.

C) From an Academic Performance Perspective: Experimental vs. Comparison Group

Although 69 students completed FRA1705, analysis of student performance data was limited to the 58 students who were graduates of Ontario French-language secondary schools and direct-entry first-year students, as the university only has access to the final grade 12 marks in the pre-university language admission requirement (FRA4U) for these students. We will refer to this group of 58 as the experimental group. Using propensity score matching¹⁴ for the variables of region, age, gender, school board, program, FRA4U grades and admission averages (+/- 1%), a comparison group of 58 students was identified. This matching technique allows for the calibration of the comparison group and match for students from the experimental group, based on the above-named variables. After the technique was applied, one Ontario student, a graduate of an Ontario English-language secondary school, was excluded from analysis for the experimental group as she could not be matched within the control group.

Table 1 highlights the differences and similarities between the francophone cohort from Ontario, the experimental group and the comparison group established by propensity matching.

Table 1: Characteristics of Experimental and Comparison Groups

Matching Variables	Ontario Francophone Cohort, Social Sciences and Arts	Experimental Group (Ontario only), FRA1705	Comparison Group (Ontario only)
Region of Ontario			
Central Southwestern	11.71%	18.97%	18.97%
Eastern	77.82%	36.21%	36.21%
Northern	10.47%	44.83%	44.83%
Age			
Under 18	0.31%		
18	35.13%	18.97%	18.97%
19	61.14%	77.59%	77.59%
20	2.38%	3.45%	3.45%
20 and over	1.04%		
Final grade FRA4U			
Less than 74%	19.17%	22.41%	22.41%
74-78%	21.76%	10.34%	10.34%

¹⁴ Propensity score matching is a quasi experimental technique (as participants were not chosen randomly), that is used to calculate the probabilities (the propensity score) to measure the proximity of variables between the experimental and comparison groups, in order to ensure that the subjects chosen for the comparison group have the same characteristics as the experimental group for the chosen variables.

79-83%	21.45%	8.62%	8.62%
84-92%	33.06%	50.0%	50.0%
93-100%	4.56%	8.62%	8.62%
Gender			
Female	63.73%	81.03%	81.03%
Male	36.27%	18.07%	18.07%
Total number of cases	965	58	58

Furthermore, the comparison group had a slightly higher, though not statistically significant, admission average (85% vs. 83.5%), while the experimental group had a statistically significant higher grade point average (GPA) at the end of the first year of study at university at (5.79 vs. 5.42 for the comparison group).

Table 2 demonstrates the expanded GPA at the end of the first term for both groups.

Table 2: GPA, End of Session 1 (December 2012)

		Achievement						
Group	stat	Missing	IN	SR	RF	RP	MN	Promoted
Experimental	N	.	.	1	2		8	47
	%	.	.	1.72%	3.45%		13.79%	81.03%
Control	N	4	1	1	3	1	13	35
	%	6.9%	1.72%	1.72%	5.17%	1.72%	22.41%	60.34%

Table 3, below, reports achievement by group at the end of year one. A quick glance at the values indicates that more students in the control group had a non-satisfactory GPA or were asked to withdraw from the faculty or program than students in the experimental group. The differences in the number of students promoted is statistically significant

Table 3: Student Achievement, Experimental and Control Groups, 2012, End of Year 1

		Achievement						
Group	stat	Missing	IN	SR	RF	RP	MN	Promoted
Experimental	N	.	.	1	2		8	47
	%	.	.	1.72%	3.45%		13.79%	81.03%
Control	N	4	1	1	3	1	13	35
	%	6.9%	1.72%	1.72%	5.17%	1.72%	22.41%	60.34%

IN = Incomplete

MN = Non-satisfactory GPA (probation)

RF= Must withdraw from faculty
 RP = Must withdraw from program

SR = Subject to review

An independent t-test ($t= 1.32$, $DF= 111$) $p >.05$ indicates that the difference in GPA between the two groups after one session is not statistically significant, although the experimental group does have a higher GPA than the control group (5.79 vs. 5.42). A matched (paired) t-test was performed between the GPA after 1 session and GPA after year 1. The comparisons are not significant within each group (Table 4). It should be noted that all students in both groups had also taken some courses in English. Thus looking only at GPA does not identify the impact of FRA1705 on courses taught in French. Although not statistically significant, we do see an increase in GPA for the experimental group between the end of the first session and the GPA at end of year one.

Table 4: Effect of FRA1705 on GPA

GPA	Experimental	Control
After one session	5.79	5.42
End of year one	5.93	5.44
t =	1.68	-0.40
P value	> 0.05	> 0.05
DF =	57	53

We then proceeded with independent t-tests to compare the results for all courses within the experimental group only. Students achieved statistically significantly better results in FRA1705 (GPA mean 7.12) than in their other courses (GPA mean 5.87), ($DF=512$) $p < .01$. This finding is also true when we compare results between FRA1705 (GPA mean 7.12) and other courses taken in French (GPA mean 6.09), ($DF = 377$) $p < .01$. However, the results between FRA1705 and other FRA courses are not statistically significant ($DF=109$) $p > 0.05$

Using independent t-tests we compared the academic results for the experimental and control groups in FRA courses, excluding FRA1705; the differences are not statistically significant ($DF=162$) $p > 0.05$. However, comparing results for all other courses excluding FRA courses for both groups, there is a statistically significant difference ($DF= 513$) $p < .05$ between the two groups, with the experimental group performing better academically than the control group. Moreover, when we compare the results in the foundational French course and all other courses taken in French, they are, once again, statistically significant ($DF=677$) $p < .01$, favouring the experimental group over the control group.

We conducted further analysis comparing the results of all 136 students who had completed the placement test, of whom 13 were excluded from the course, 69 registered for the course and 54 did not register (even though the writing samples for 45 of them demonstrated a strong need for the course). Of the 67 students who did not make up the experimental group but who did write the placement test, seven were included in the control group data. Key success data for all four groups (Experimental, Control, Not recommended and Did not register) are presented in table 5.

Table 5: Student Success Data by Group, 2012

Group	GPA 1 Session	CGPA End Year 1	Excluding FRA Courses	Courses in French	Foundational French Course	FRA4U Average
Experimental N=58	5.45	5.51	5.82	6.09	6.75	81.9
Control N=58	5.29	5.15	5.36	5.52	6.22	82.2
Not recommended N=13	6.60	6.46	7.10	6.09	7.75	86.63
Did not register N=54	5.06	5.26	5.75	4.89	6.33	79.28

The sample sizes are too small to run comparison tests for all four groups.

Limitations

The small size of both the experimental and control groups are important limitations to the generalizability of these findings. The analyses conducted sought to inform the decision-making processes at the university and provide input for important dialogues around the question of academic literacy and student success in light of increased student heterogeneity. The second iteration of FRA1705 being studied in 2013-2014 will provide increased sample sizes to analyze and further inform our decision making-processes. Several participants reported limited opportunities to write at length in their first-year classes. Further analysis of the course's impact continues using student success data for Year 2.

Conclusion

Findings from this pilot study at the University of Ottawa have significance beyond the scope of this research project. They demonstrate the impact of providing students with different pathways within the institution as they complete their degrees, as well as the need for far-ranging discussions of the purpose and scope of foundational language courses in both French and English programs. Above all, this pilot study confirms that FRA1705 significantly impacted students' academic success in their other courses offered in French. However, it did not impact their academic success in their other FRA courses.

Ontario is one of several Canadian jurisdictions without a standardized assessment of skills and competencies at the end of secondary school. As there are little to no analyses that address Ontario student results in the mandatory provincial testing in grades 3, 6, 9 and 10 and in light of PISA scores (Dion & Maldonado, 2013a), the University of Ottawa and all postsecondary institutions must question how to identify their students' baseline academic literacy at admission. In turn, the institutions must then provide students with the necessary tools or access to strategies to be able to develop and improve their literacy skills and competencies in light of the demands of a globalized workforce and/or postgraduate studies.

As it stands, there are few opportunities for the various levels of the education system to enter into an authentic dialogue around literacy. Such a dialogue could begin with secondary schools and school boards, colleges and universities, within educational jurisdictions. In light of increased student mobility and the diversity of pathways into universities and other PSE institutions, as well as the greater importance of learning

outcomes and quality control for higher education, institutions need to have a better understanding of the outcomes of the various educational jurisdictions and programs that lead students to their doors.

The findings of the FRA1705 pilot project allow us to answer all four of our research questions. Despite the limitations of a small sample size, participants confirm that they feel that FRA1705 has positively impacted their academic performance as it pertains to writing in French for their classes taught in French, but not necessarily in the FRA classes. Furthermore, they report that the FRA1705 class has also contributed to improving their oral communication skills in French. Students stated that the course provided them with the opportunity to become more confident in their “*métier d’étudiant*” (Coulon, 2005), which, in turn, positively impacted their social and academic integration into the University of Ottawa community. The small class sizes and the importance of having an instructor who knew them by name were deemed by the participants to be important for a positive transition to university, as was learning the FRA1705 course content. The course instructors and designers attest that students improved their writing throughout the course, as was evident not only in the writing produced for assessments but also in the students’ increased autonomy and confidence as writers and editors. Finally, the quantitative analysis of student academic performance data for the experimental and control groups supports the qualitative findings of the positive impact of FRA1705 on students’ success in their other courses taught in French.

Our pilot study at the University of Ottawa has raised more questions than it has provided answers. In April 2013, in light of the preliminary analyses available at the time, the university decided to pursue the pilot study for a second year. This second iteration, which is also being tracked by a research project, enables us to collect and analyze student success data for a larger sample. The course design for 2013-2014 implemented many elements of the feedback collected during the 2012-2013 pilot study. Two of the three instructors continue teaching the four sections and they continue to work with the pedagogical support committee on a bi-weekly basis. A first focus group with students was run in November 2013 and a survey will be launched shortly after the fall session marks are released to students. In the fall of 2013, 77 students were enrolled across four sections of FRA1705. We hope that this second year of the pilot study will provide answers to some of the questions that emerged in 2012-2013.

In light of the academic and linguistic diversity of our incoming students, one recommendation that comes to bear after analyzing the findings of the pilot study is the need for an internal committee whose mandate would be to look at foundational courses to identify how to multiply the pathways to program completion within the institution. This committee would ideally explore all facets of academic literacy, including oral and written communication across disciplines and for a variety of audiences. In light of Ontario’s commitment to facilitating student transfer between PSE institutions (colleges, universities) and increasing the PSE participation rate of its citizens, a provincial committee with the same mandate would also be welcome. This committee, which would include representatives from Ontario PSE institutions as well as school boards, would start from the premise that all stakeholders have a part to play.

As Graves (2013) eloquently pleaded in his article on why students struggle with writing, institutions must explore further the importance of writing across disciplines and for different audiences. This requires them to look beyond discipline-focused writing. It is in keeping with this perspective that the *Association des universités francophones du Canada* (AUFC), where initial analysis of our findings was presented, has been piloting an initiative to increase dialogue between Canada’s French-language and bilingual universities on the question of academic literacy in light of increased student heterogeneity. Furthermore, the University of Ottawa held a one-day symposium for French-language school board leaders, secondary school *français* teachers and professors of *français* in April 2013 to begin the dialogue with our educational partners. A second symposium was held in May 2014, sponsored by the *Direction des politiques et programmes d’éducation en langue française* (Ministry of Education and MTCU), to which representatives from all of

Ontario's French-language colleges and bilingual universities as well as French-language school boards were invited.¹⁵ This kind of event will contribute to furthering the discussion on our shared responsibility for students' academic success as they transition to and through PSE in Ontario.

¹⁵ Please consult <http://www.uottawa.ca/vr-etudes-academic/en/symposium.html> for information regarding the symposium.

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