

## Tami Afdahl

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**From:** Dennis Misurell [dennis.misurell@ewc.wy.edu]  
**Sent:** Monday, November 03, 2008 3:39 PM  
**To:** Dee Ludwig; Tami Afdahl; Connie Woehl; Andrea Bryant; Cheryl Raboin; Patti Sue Peterson; Bob Creagar; Ray Dewitt; Janet Martindale; Geri Lewis; Chris Hilton; Diana Quealy-Berge; Debbie Ochsner; Chris Urbanek; Rex Cogdill  
**Subject:** Should Bridge Be Continued...  
**Attachments:** Should we continue Bridge.docx

Dear Fellow FoE Committee Members, Bridge Teachers, and Other Interested Faculty:

The attached is meant to be a "thought starter" supporting the continuation of Bridge as a best practice for the first-year experience. It summarizes why I believe the program makes sense, and how we can address concerns of those who believe that COMPASS placement into higher level courses may be harmful for Bridge participants. If you have comments, please forward them to my attention. My note is meant only to get the discussion started. It does not in any way represent a final evaluation by the Improvement Committee as to the merits of the program.

Thanks for your help in advance.

Dennis Misurell

## To the FoE Committee for the Dimension of Improvement:

### Re: Should we continue Bridge?

The answer is yes, for several reasons:

- Bridge helps many students who are deemed to be “at risk” to become more successful. One need only look at the program's success stories. Several of whom we would call our most “successful” students over the past two years are Bridge graduates.
- Bridge builds community. Many Bridge graduates report that the friendships they build in the program persist well beyond the program's end.
- Bridge builds student confidence. It acclimatizes new students to the demands of EWC far beyond what a more traditional orientation program would do. Bridge students leave much more assured that they can do the work demanded of a college curricula.
- Bridge suggests a new direction for the first year experience at EWC. It embraces a learning community approach to our whole curricula. What we have learned about how to create teamwork, participation, and student involvement in the first year is worth the price of sustaining the experiment.

Why does Bridge work? I'd suggest these two main reasons:

- Bridge works because it is full of content. It's not just eating pizza and singing Kumbaya on the front lawn. There are hours of instruction in English and mathematics. Students learn how to do the work of demanded in college because they actually do a lot of work in the program.
- Bridge works because it aims at “whole person development.” There are explicit discussions of the traits of successful students, and then participants are expected to display those traits in the program.

Still, Bridge has its critics. I would suggest to the critics of Bridge that the issue to debate is not whether we should run Bridge at all. Rather, the issue to debate instead is whether or not we should continue to COMPASS students at the end of the program, and if so, with what standards should we assess student performance upon the program's completion. The benefits of Bridge far outweigh any negatives, and the negatives may be addressed with a different testing policy.

So, should Bridge participants be COMPASS tested at the program's end?

The “pro-testing” side has powerful arguments in its favor.

- If there is no testing, then how can we maintain a program loaded with subject content? Bridge participants are motivated to go through the program's content when there is the prospect of higher placement. Bridge students display true joy when they test higher at the end of a week of hard work.
- As a matter of fairness, Bridge students should be compensated for the effort that they display in the program. I can't see how we can expect new “at risk” students to work effectively for hours on reading, writing, and mathematics without an incentive of higher placement.
- Why should Bridge students who test into a higher level class be treated any differently than non-Bridge students who test into a higher level class with self-study? I can't see the logic that says the situations are different.

But the “anti-testing” side has powerful arguments that must be examined too.

- Real progress in most subjects depends upon steady progression through material. It takes distributed practice to build that steady progression. How can that happen in a week's time?

- The rapid pace of the Bridge curriculum, particularly in mathematics, might suggest a “cramming effect” that allows students to succeed in the short-run, but without substantial long-term student retention of material.
- Are we setting Bridge students up for failure when we advance them to levels beyond what their true long-run capabilities might actually be?

I have sympathy for the “anti-test” perspective, because I know the importance of solid foundations for mathematics success, particularly in MATH 0920. But I would suggest that the answer lies not in scuttling Bridge, but rather it lies in raising the standards for advancement to the next level through COMPASS testing by Bridge candidates. Current standards for placement into MATH 0920 and MATH 0930 may be too low. I see many MATH 0920 students who place into that class (via Bridge or via self-study) with pre-algebra scores in the 40's. These students often don't have mastery of basic operations, fractions, decimals, percents, ratios, and proportions. They obtain weak grades because they don't have such mastery. With higher standards (probably in the mid-50's for pre-algebra and algebra), students with weak command of algebraic and pre-algebraic skills would not be placed into classes beyond their skill levels.

Let's not blame Bridge for a problem that we may have created with our COMPASS standards. Instead, let's conduct the experiment that Bridge deserves. Next year, let's set Bridge's standards for placement to be 10 points higher than current levels (55 or higher for pre-algebra and 50 or higher on algebra COMPASS scores). Then let's track the performance of those who pass a higher bar for entry into MATH 0920 and MATH 0930 classes to see if we have addressed issue of advancement beyond skill level adequately.

I hope that my comments begin an active and vigorous debate on a most important program for EWC.

Respectfully submitted,

Dennis Misurell

Good Morning,

I am not on the FoE Committee for the Dimension of Improvement; however, since this was sent to me I feel I have been given "permission" to add to this discussion.

The question of "should we continue Bridge" does need some examination and discussion. From my short tenure here at Eastern Wyoming College I have heard many things, positive, negative and concern about the program. I am still very neutral about the program but I myself have some questions. Let me first by addressing some of the things Dennis has said in his previous e-mail.

Comments such as "Bridge builds community" would be a reason I would support keeping the program. Any program that will introduce students to each other, shows students the benefits of working with someone else and improves student's knowledge of a subject is a positive tool.

The "Bridge builds student confidence" and "Bridge students leave much more assured that they can do the work demanded of a college curricula" is half true and raises some of the critics questions. Yes, they can work in an intensive setting and improve their abilities for the short term and they are excited that they can take 920 verses 900 or 930 verses 920. For the students who were "borderline" before participating in Bridge and were able to raise their score to place in the 920 or 930 it gives them the confidence to continue to do well and apply themselves to their own success. However, if the student is more than "borderline", they "cram" the material, learn it short term, get placed into the higher level mathematics, they may struggle with the content more than their peers. As teachers, we expect a student to have the prerequisites for the class they are taking. If students don't have a solid foundation of the concepts, when we try to add to their knowledge base they begin to struggle and it becomes very difficult for them to succeed. In Dennis's note he states in the section for "anti-testing" "[r]eal progress in most subjects depends upon steady progression through material. It takes distributed practice to build that steady progression. How can that happen in a week's time?" I think if the student is borderline the program is likely a huge benefit. However, I also think we need to be careful when we consider students for the Bridge program as I do not believe this program is for someone who is more than borderline.

Sitting on the front lawn singing Kumbaya while eating pizza sounds like a great time. I had a discussion today with someone concerning presenting too much material at one time to students. How much can we teach a student in one setting without them going and "practicing" the concepts on their own? How much can we expect students to retain if they sit and listen to lecture for 5 hours? At a certain point the students aren't absorbing much of the information. We need this knowledge to move from short term memory to long term memory. This process takes time and I believe time for them to practice it themselves. I have had students tell me that I make it look so easy, they are able to follow along with what I am doing on the board, answer questions but get to their dorm and it is like a new concept. How often does this happen with the students in Bridge? Short term memory is only good to pass a test given right away after the "intense" lecture, not for long term understanding. Our goal should be for the students to have a long term understanding of the content.

Should the Bridge participants be COMPASS tested at the program's end? Yes. This is for two reasons. The first is to show that students have made enough progress to move to the next level. Also, it ensures that the program is remaining focused on its goal of providing a rich learning environment where students can learn and hopefully excel to the next level of mathematics. This "post test" also will show to students that hard work pays off. I say this keeping in mind that this program should be for students

who are "borderline" when taking this program. Should there be a maximum number of points a student can raise their score if they used the Bridge program? I do not think that there is a difference between students who participate in Bridge and those who self-study. We just need to make sure we are keeping the integrity of all of our programs.

In the second to last paragraph of Dennis's note he seems to advocate "raising the standards for advancement to the next level through COMPASS testing by Bridge candidates" are you saying that Bridge candidates should be treated differently than others who wish to re-take the COMPASS test? I don't think this would be a good thing to begin. I might agree that the standards for placement into 920 and 930 might be raised however such a raise should be independent of participation in the Bridge program. If these standards are to be raised then they need to be raised for everyone, not just Bridge participants. We need to keep in mind if those standards are set by another party then we are not in a position to change those standards.

I don't think we should wait until next year to look at the Bridge program. We should see if it is working and track progress of the students who were in Bridge last summer. We could look at their pre-Bridge scores, post-Bridge scores, marks earned in the placed course. Then as spring semester nears conclusion we could look at their marks then to track progress over more than one semester. Look how well the students do when advanced; see if how much they advance, affects their success and such. I mean if they were 15 points away and jumped did they perform as well as someone who jumped 5 points into the next level, does the amount of "jump" affect their outcome in the class they were placed? I would be happy to head a committee to look at this information. It has a lot of attention of many people on campus and having a discussion as Dennis has begun is a good starting point but having "real" data and tracking real students, how they perform in the classes they placed in would give more creditability to any discussion.

## Tami Afdahl

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**From:** Dennis Misurell [dennis.misurell@ewc.wy.edu]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, November 19, 2008 3:38 PM  
**To:** Ray Dewitt; Dee Ludwig; Tami Afdahl; Connie Woehli; Andrea Bryant; Cheryl Raboin; Patti Sue Peterson; Bob Creagar; Janet Martindale; Geri Lewis; Chris Hilton; Diana Quealy-Berge; Debbie Ochsner; Chris Urbanek; Rex Cogdill  
**Subject:** RE: Should Bridge Be Continued...

Dear Ray,

Thank you very much for a very thoughtful response to my comments. This is exactly the kind of response for which I was hoping from those who were copied on the memo. I hope that others on this copy list will add to what you have written and continue the debate.

I also wish to give you a couple of top line reactions to what you have written:

1. When I come down to teach Bridge every year, I worry about deeply about the issue of whether or not I'm creating a larger problem with the students that I try to assist. Thank you for recognizing a) that it might be a problem and b) that I really do want better answers on the subject than I have had to date.
2. I do want to correct one impression about how I teach the math component of Bridge. I "lecture" very little when I'm with Bridge students. Instead, the majority of my time is spent in small discussions with students. My focus is on completing problem sets on topics that I know COMPASS covers. My pedagogical style is very much like "group tutoring." I make every effort to group students by ability and I have them teach each other a lot of the time. (If you were to come into my Bridge classroom, you'd see it in the very geometry of the desks. Students are grouped in 3's and 4's, and they all receive a lot of individual attention.) There is a lot of problem oriented practice and very little "listening to a lecture."
3. But even with that pedagogical adjustment, I still worry about the issue of practice. It's so important for mastery in MATH 0920 and MATH 0930. Do they get enough? I don't know at this point. They get just about as much as I can provide in the confines of the program. (Maybe it's time for all of us in math to ask the question, "What the heck is happening with our homework these days?" But that's the subject of another memo.)
4. I'm in substantial agreement with what you write about "borderline" vs. "non-borderline" students. I just wish that I knew where that borderline should be drawn, particularly in pre-algebra. I see a lot of students at Douglas who score in the 40's in pre-algebra and who enter MATH 0920 seriously underprepared for its challenges. I don't know that a student coming into Bridge with a 42 in pre-algebra and leaving with a 48 is much better off—but that sure translates to a lift from MATH 0900 to MATH 0920, doesn't it?)
5. I'm glad that you support post-program testing. However imperfect a testing vehicle COMPASS may be, it's the best tool we have to see if anything we do in Bridge is working on a substantive level.
6. I'm also with you on the issue of standards. We're should live with one standard, and unfortunately, that standard lies mostly outside of our control. But I wanted to send a strong signal to everyone who is concerned about the issue of creating a problem that I am sensitive to the issue—so much so that I would be willing to live with a much higher "bar" for Bridge participants in order to prevent a such problem from occurring.
7. Thank you very much for volunteering to head a committee that looks at the issue empirically. I'll support you in any way that I can do to help you move in that direction. I think that's a great way to lead the discussion productively. I support an empirical approach, so much so that I'd support a well-controlled experiment (beyond an examination of current records) with any component of Bridge—that's how committed I want to be to empirical examination of the issues.

Thanks again, Ray, for a good and balanced discussion.

Sincerely,

Dennis Misurell

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**From:** Ray Dewitt [mailto:Ray.Dewitt@ewc.wy.edu]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, November 19, 2008 10:18 AM

**To:** Dennis Misurell; Dee Ludwig; Tami Afdahl; Connie Woehl; Andrea Bryant; Cheryl Raboin; Patti Sue Peterson; Bob Creagar; Janet Martindale; Geri Lewis; Chris Hilton; Diana Quealy-Berge; Debbie Ochsner; Chris Urbanek; Rex Cogdill  
**Subject:** RE: Should Bridge Be Continued...

I drafted a response to Dennis's comments and concerns. This opinion is only mine and does not necessarily reflect the opinion of anyone else at EWC or any member of the mathematics department.

I will add that I commend Dennis for prompting this discussion.

*Ray DeWitt*

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**From:** Dennis Misurell [mailto:dennis.misurell@ewc.wy.edu]

**Sent:** Monday, November 03, 2008 3:39 PM

**To:** Dee Ludwig; Tami Afdahl; Connie Woehl; Andrea Bryant; Cheryl Raboin; Patti Sue Peterson; Bob Creagar; Ray Dewitt; Janet Martindale; Geri Lewis; Chris Hilton; Diana Quealy-Berge; Debbie Ochsner; Chris Urbanek; Rex Cogdill

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Thanks for your help in advance.

Dennis Misurell

## Tami Afdahl

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**From:** Judy Brown  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 08, 2009 1:40 PM  
**To:** Tami Afdahl  
**Subject:** FW: FOE

Hi Tami  
This is what I got  
Thanks

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**From:** Andrea Bryant  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 08, 2009 1:35 PM  
**To:** Judy Brown  
**Subject:** RE: FOE

Hi Judy! I'll take a stab at this over email. I may think of something to add later, but at least this will get you a start.

The outcomes of the Bridge Program are assessed a few different ways.

- 1) I gather verbal information from the students about their perceptions of the program's success and the impact it will have on their ability to be successful. This I gather informally, but generally get constructive criticism about the topics and structure of the program. This includes information about how connected to the institution students feel because research shows that students that have some kind of connection to the institution are more likely to be retained compared to those that do not feel connected. These suggestions tend to be the best way for me to tweak the program for the following year.
- 2) I gather information from the program instructors and myself based on observations we make of the student population we are serving and how the program is implemented. I gauge things like engagement, fatigue, attendance, and so forth through observation and discussions with instructors. This helps us target particular students that may be having trouble or may be high risk for having trouble once school starts. These discussions and observations are also a major component of how the program is tweaked for the next year. For example, this has prompted a restructured College Studies class for the Bridge Program students that will be going through its second major restructure since the program started.
- 3) I formally ask the students to comment in writing on what they liked best/benefitted the most from in the program and what they liked least/benefitted the least from in the program. This questionnaire is taken four weeks or more after the program has ended.
- 4) I evaluate success in college courses by looking at course grades in math, reading, and English, and looking at overall GPA and student status (good standing, probation, suspension, dismissal) at the end of each semester and comparing the Bridge Program students to their "control group," which is defined as the group of students that were invited to the program, but did not attend the program. Retention the following semester and the following year is also something I evaluate for both groups. I'm behind on gathering this data, but it typically shows that the Bridge Program students do about the same as the control group.

Please let me know if you need any additional information or need clarification on any of this. Sorry I missed you when you stopped by.

Andrea