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*Spelling Abilities
of University
Students in
Developmental
Writing Classes*

Forty-four students at a mid-sized urban university were given a pseudo-word spelling test to explore the relationship between their spelling ability and their placement in college writing courses. Half the students required a developmental writing course and half took college-level classes. Number of correct (i.e., orthographically possible) spellings and types of spelling errors were recorded. Students in developmental classes misspelled considerably more words, and made more errors per word, than the students in college-level classes. In particular, developmental students made more substitution errors, using an inappropriate letter to represent a sound, especially misrepresenting vowels. These results are similar to findings reported for younger students with learning disabilities, raising the possibility that some developmental college-age students may have language learning disabilities that are undiagnosed and untreated.

Many students who lack prerequisite writing skills for success in college are being placed in developmental classes, which they must pass before moving on to required college-level instruction in writing. Students in many developmental writing courses, as evidenced by the textbooks available, may receive instruction at the metacognitive level in brainstorming ideas, outlining, and paragraph development. Sentence structure, punctuation, and standard usage are typically also addressed. Still, at least in this author's experience, large numbers of students in developmental classes fail the course in a given semester.

For example, a recent examination of three consecutive semesters at a typical fourth tier, mid-sized state university, the site of the study