Information for High School Students Enrolling in College-Level English Courses

Pellissippi State policy requires high school students enrolling in ENGL 1010, Composition I, to have senior standing. That is, the student needs to have completed 11th grade English to be eligible to take ENGL 1010 as a Dual Enrollment student.

On occasion, students and their parents ask the English Department to bypass the policy in order to facilitate the enrollment of younger students, those who have completed only one or two years of high school English, for example. While we understand that students are eager to gather college credits while still in high school, the department has given careful consideration to the reasons students should not rush into a college-level writing class.

The most frequent reason high school students cite for wanting to register for ENGL 1010 is “to get it out of the way,” but our experience tells us that ENGL 1010 is arguably one of the most important classes a student takes in college. The skills gained in ENGL 1010 set the groundwork for the rest of the writing a student does in the academic arena and later in the workplace. English 1010 is also a challenging course. The writing requires a high level of critical thinking, and evidence from both neuroscientists and social scientists suggests that the human brain typically does not reach full maturation until a person reaches his or her early twenties. Thus, the younger the student, the less likely he or she is to be able to do the work for the class at a high level. We have seen very successful high school students become overwhelmed by the volume of work and/or the college-level standards and expectations.

Faculty in the English Department have also noticed that although many Dual Enrollment students are ready for the challenge of college, others struggle with the self-discipline necessary to complete assignments on time, attend class regularly, or participate actively in class discussion. Leaving the comfort of the high school or home school environment and entering a college classroom with students from a wide variety of backgrounds and age ranges can make an otherwise confident young person feel insecure. Although our faculty members are always willing to discuss drafts of essays or progress in the course, younger students seem more hesitant to step forward and seek out the help they need. Regardless of their age and high school status, once students enroll in Pellissippi State, they are college students who must take a large measure of responsibility for their own learning.

Furthermore, the content in an ENGL 1010 course can be a touch on the sensitive side for younger students. While professors certainly do not assign material with the intent to shock or titillate, the essays in the text do cover controversial subjects that invite free and lively discussion in the classroom. One of the great advantages of attending college is that students’ minds can be opened up to topics they never knew existed, ideas they never had considered, and perspectives very different from their own. But not all students are ready for that enriching experience quite yet.

The faculty in the English Department want our students to be challenged by our courses and encouraged by the knowledge and skills they gain. We wish all our students success, but we also know that knowledge, maturation, and achievement most often arrive in their own good time. Therefore, we remain committed to our seniors-only policy for ENGL 1010.