

The content on this page will not be updated after June 30, 2006.

General College is now the [Department of Postsecondary Teaching and Learning](#) in the College of Education and Human Development.

The Relationship Between GC 1422 and
Other Composition Courses Offered
at the University of Minnesota

by

Robert C. delMas, PhD

December 1, 1994

At the request of Terry Collins, a study was conducted to determine whether or not General College composition courses prepared students for future composition courses at the University of Minnesota. Composition is taught in the General College as a two-quarter sequence consisting of the courses GC 1421 and GC 1422. The University of Minnesota registration database was used to identify all students who had taken COMP 1027, RHET 3562, or any 3000-level COMP course and all students who had taken GC 1422. GC 1422 grades were then matched with grades in the other composition courses. Students were identified as having started in General College or in one of the other freshmen admitting colleges. The data set was then limited to those students who started at the University as of fall 1987 or later. Fall 1987 was selected because it represented a point in time when GC 1422 was being taught in a way similar to the approach used at the time of the study. Finally, not all 3000-level COMP courses were used in the study. Several courses had either none or only a few (1 to 5) students who started in the General College. These courses were eliminated from the data set. The final result was a data set with 9,164 students, 553 of whom started in the General College.

Tables 1 through 3 present a picture of the grade distribution among the different composition courses. The vast majority of students (60% or better) earned grades of B or higher. Several things are worth noting in Table 2. The most common composition courses for GC students appear to be COMP 1027, COMP 3014, and RHET 3562. GC students do well in these courses with about 70% earning As or Bs in the two COMP courses, and 81% earning As or Bs in RHET 3562. Table 3 points out that while GC students don't perform as well as non-GC students in their first composition course, GC student performance is still quite high and comparable (75% As and Bs for GC compared to 88% As and Bs for non-GC students).

Table 1.

Distribution of grades in GC 1422 among students who took a composition course after GC 1422.

Sample Size	% A+	% A	% B+	% B	% C+	% C	% C-	% D	% F
435	19	19	35	12	9	4	2	1	0

Table 2.

Distribution of grades in composition courses for students who started in General College.

Composition Course	Sample Size	% A	% B	% C	% D	% F
COMP 1027	126	16	54	26	2	2
COMP 3011	37	22	49	27	0	3
COMP 3012	19	16	47	37	0	0
COMP 3013	32	19	66	16	0	0
COMP 3014	117	16	53	29	1	1
COMP 3015	17	12	65	18	0	6
COMP 3022	21	10	71	19	0	0
COMP 3027	80	16	61	23	0	0
COMP 3031	16	31	56	6	0	0
COMP 3033	32	34	50	16	0	0
RHET 3562	106	25	56	15	0	3

Table 3.

Comparison of grades in first composition course (other than GC 1422) between students who started in General College and those who did not.

Started in GC	Sample Size	% A	% B	% C	% D	% F
YES	553	18	57	22	1	1
NO	8,611	39	49	9	1	1

Table 4 presents one way of looking at the relationship between GC 1422 grades and grades in other composition courses. There is a positive correlation that is significantly different than zero, but the relationships are rather low. The highest correlation is between GC 1422 grades and COMP 1027 grades ($r = .33$). This correlation indicates that only 11% of the variance in COMP 1027 grades is explained by performance in GC 1422. The overall correlation between GC 1422 and a student's first composition course after GC 1422 is .21 (about 4.5% of the variance accounted for). There is basically no relationship between GC 1422 and RHET 3562. These low correlations can be mostly attributed to the lack of variation in grades for composition courses. There is little variability in GC 1422 grades (see Table 1), and even less variability in COMP course grades (students tend to get As or Bs). Low variability in both the dependent and independent measures makes it difficult to establish a relationship.

Table 4.

Correlations between grade in GC 1422 and first composition course taken after GC 1422.

	COMP 1027	3000-LEVEL COMP COURSE	RHET 3562	ANY COMP COURSE
Sample Size	101	287	91	435
Correlation	.33	.26	.06	.21
Significance	.001	.000	.589	.000

A second way of looking at the relationship between GC 1422 and composition course grades is presented in Table 5. Here, grades in GC 1422 are crosstabulated with grades in the first composition course a student took after taking GC 1422. It is rare for a student to earn a D or F in a composition course, regardless of a student's grade in GC 1422. The

likelihood of earning a grade of A does increase, however, as grade in GC 1422 increases, as does the likelihood of earning a B or higher in the composition course. This is probably the strongest evidence that suggests a positive relationship between GC 1422 and composition course performance. The findings do not necessarily mean that a student who earns a higher grade in GC 1422 is better prepared to take a composition course. It may simply be that GC 1422 sorts out students in a similar fashion to the composition courses. The remaining tables somewhat address this issue.

Table 5.

Comparison of grades in GC 1422 with grades in first composition course after taking GC 1422.

GC 1422 Grade	Sample Size	Grade in Composition Course				
		% A	% B	% C	% D	% F
A+	81	32	54	14	0	0
A	81	19	64	14	0	4
B+	150	15	61	23	1	1
C+, B	91	7	62	29	1	2
D, C, C-	32	13	41	44	3	0

Tables 6 through 8 present information relevant to the question of how students who took GC 1422 compare to students who did not with respect to their performance in composition courses. Table 6 compares all students who took GC 1422 with all students who did not. In every comparison, non-GC 1422 students have a higher average grade than students who took GC 1422. However, in every case the average for the GC 1422 students is always very close to a B average, and the same summary statement can be made for the students who did not take GC 1422. Practically speaking, there's not much of a difference between the two groups even though the differences are statistically significant. This is similar to the information presented in Table 3.

Table 6.

Differences in average grades in composition courses between students who took GC 1422 and those who did not.

	Took 1422	Did Not Take 1422	t-value	Significance
COMP 1027				
Sample Size	101	1154		
Average Grade	2.80	3.16	4.20	.000
3000-Level COMP Course				
Sample Size	287	6987		
Average Grade	2.90	3.24	7.45	.000
RHET 3562				
Sample Size	91	1114		
Average Grade	2.99	3.34	4.30	.000
Any COMP Course				
Sample Size	435	8729		
Average Grade	2.89	3.24	9.49	.000

Table 7 takes the same perspective as in Table 6, but now only students who started in GC are considered. A few students were found who started in GC and never took GC 1422. While students who did not take GC 1422 consistently have higher averages than those who took GC 1422, the differences are hardly worth noting. Table 8 presents similar information but now for only Caucasian students who started in GC. A higher proportion of students of color in the GC 1422 group could provide a possible reason for why the GC 1422 group had slightly lower grade averages. Table 8 shows the same trend in grade differences as found in Table 7, with two of the differences statistically significant (although the numbers indicate a B average for both groups, as before).

Table 7.

Differences in average grades in composition courses between students who took GC 1422 and those who did not among students who started in the General College.

	Took 1422	Did Not Take 1422	t-value	Significance
COMP 1027				
Sample Size	98	28		
Average Grade	2.79	2.86	.42	.675
3000-Level COMP Course				
Sample Size	278	93		
Average Grade	2.89	2.99	1.16	.245
RHET 3562				
Sample Size	90	16		
Average Grade	2.99	3.13	.62	.539
Any COMP Course				
Sample Size	424	129		
Average Grade	2.88	3.00	1.67	.096

Table 8.

Differences in average grades in composition courses between students who took GC 1422 and those who did not among caucasian students who started in the General College.

	Took 1422	Did Not Take 1422	t-value	Significance
COMP 1027				
Sample Size	66	17		
Average Grade	2.80	2.88	.37	.712
3000-Level COMP Course				
Sample Size	205	69		
Average Grade	2.91	3.12	2.16	.032
RHET 3562				
Sample Size	68	11		
Average Grade	3.12	3.27	.64	.526
Any COMP Course				

Sample Size	312	92		
Average Grade	2.90	3.10	2.29	.023

The results do not support the argument that GC 1422 is necessary for success in composition courses, nor do they argue that it isn't necessary. Many explanations could be conjured up to explain the numbers in tables 6 through 8, primarily because we have no sense of who did or did not take GC 1422. It was not possible to obtain precollege measures such as high school GPA and ACT scores for all of these students, so there is no indication of whether those who did not take GC 1422 were better prepared for composition courses than those who took GC 1422 (not that the precollege measures mentioned would provide valid measures of composition course readiness).

The results do not allow us to definitively answer the question of whether taking GC 1422 is necessary for students to be successful in future composition courses. The vast majority of students in this study did well in GC 1422 (received a B or higher). The vast majority of GC 1422 students did well in their first composition course after GC 1422 (75% received a B or higher). It may be that students who tend to do well in GC 1422 tend to go on to take a composition course outside of GC, and these same students tend to do well in the composition course. But so do all students who take composition courses at the University.