

Evaluating Academic Literacies Course Types 'GENERAL' VERSUS 'SPECIFIC' Impact on Student Academic Outcomes

RESEARCH CONTEXT

Regional Commonwealth Caribbean University

- 2018 Recommendation of UWI Mona External Quality Assurance Review of Academic Literacies courses:

Transfer students successful in Semester 1 of **Foun1019** 'General Purposes/Mixed-Faculty' course to **Foun1013** 'Specific purposes/Faculty-specific' course, versus continuing in **Foun1019** in Semester 2.

- Rationale:** Assumption that Academic Literacies 'general purposes' courses disadvantage students, failing to provide a disciplinary orientation.

MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION:

Does UWI Academic Literacies **COURSE TYPE** Impact Social Sciences Students' Academic Outcomes???

Foun 1013 (Specific Purposes)

'Critical Reading & Writing in the Social Sciences' - for Social Sciences students with English Language qualifications that suggest possession of satisfactory levels of reading & writing proficiency in English for university purposes.

Foun 1019 (General Purposes):

'Critical Reading & Writing in the Disciplines' - for mixed faculty (including Social Sciences) students who fail the UWI Mona English language proficiency test.

THE JAMAICAN LANGUAGE SITUATION

Language Identity: Large numbers of students in both the **Foun1019** & **Foun1013** courses speak Jamaican Creole as a mother tongue

English is the official language of Jamaica: it is used to conduct all governmental & educational practices, and is accorded a high status.

Jamaican Creole (an English-lexified creole) is the vernacular, the mother tongue of most Jamaicans. It is ascribed a low status.

Jamaica's language situation is considered to be diglossic with two closely related languages: The (H)igh variety language is generally used in formal contexts and the (L)ow variety is used in informal situations (Kennedy, 2017).

PARENT DEBATE:

Specific or General English for Academic Purposes

FOR/PRO 'GENERAL PURPOSES' APPROACH

- de Chazal (2012)** NOT EAP teacher's job "to work towards discipline familiarity. Learner-centredness= student's responsibility to deal with subject specificity".
- ESAP is only likely to be successful in environments in which students are from the same cognate discipline and the ESAP teacher has the resources dedicated to those disciplines. With increased specialization comes the need for more "interdisciplinary dialogue".
- Feak (2011)** - Academic Literacies courses rely on students as informants. AL Instructors should not be expected to know what content instructors know/to have disciplinary content expertise before courses are offered.
- It is difficult to describe discipline-specific content as differences will be present.

VS

FOR/PRO 'SPECIFIC PURPOSES' APPROACH

- "Disciplines are largely created and maintained through the distinctive ways in which members jointly construct a view of the world through their discourses" (Hyland, 2016, pp. 20-21).
- FACTORS SUPPORTING ESP**
- Disciplinary forms of argument;
- Knowledge attribution (from actors in the field, to schools of thought to non-attributed canonical forms);
- Writing style (e.g. relative readability, sentence length, use of sub-technical lexis);
- Citation practices;
- Rhetorical structure(s);
- Stance, Voice, Writer Engagement strategies

MIXED METHODS RESEARCH DESIGN

QUANTITATIVE

Descriptive statistics (percentages, means & standard deviation); Correlational tests (ANOVA; Tukey test of statistical significance for unequal group sizes.)

QUALITATIVE

Questionnaires/Interviews/
Focus Groups/
Content & Pedagogy Analysis

SOCIAL SCIENCES STUDENTS IN **FOUN1013** SPECIFIC PURPOSES COURSE

Grade Point Averages (GPA)

Pass Rates in Social Sciences Courses

SOCIAL SCIENCES STUDENTS IN **FOUN1019** GENERAL PURPOSES COURSE

Grades in Social Sciences Courses

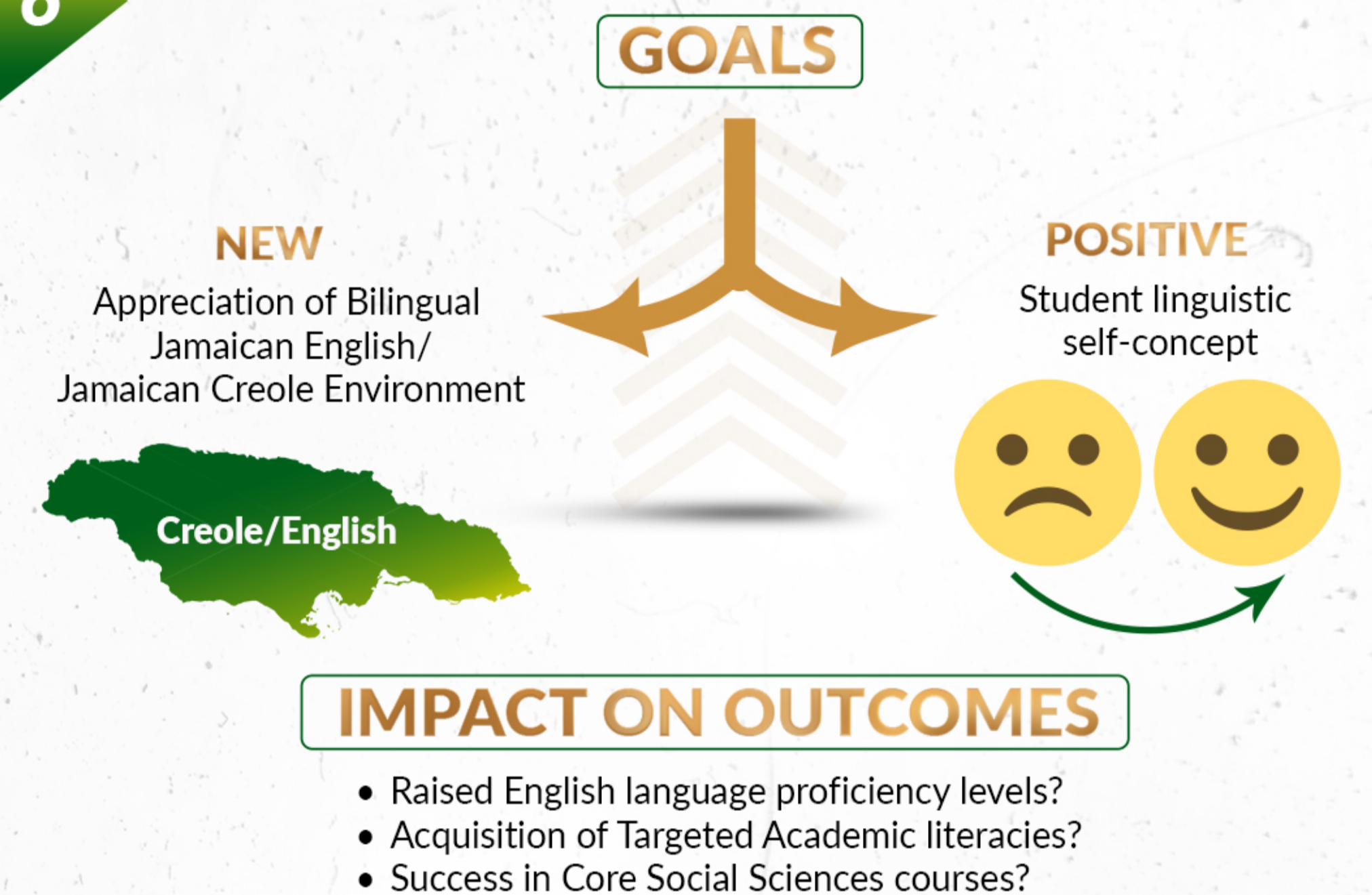
I. Course Content/Delivery: **Analysing Relevance/ Relationship of Academic Literacies course curricula to Social Sciences Students' needs/studies**

- Core Social Sciences courses
- Foun1013 (Specific purposes)
- Foun1019 (General purposes)

II. Foun1019 (General purposes) **Analysing Foun1019 Leveraging of Disciplinary Intersections in developing students' academic literacies? How? How Effective?**

EMBEDDED AREA OF INQUIRY:

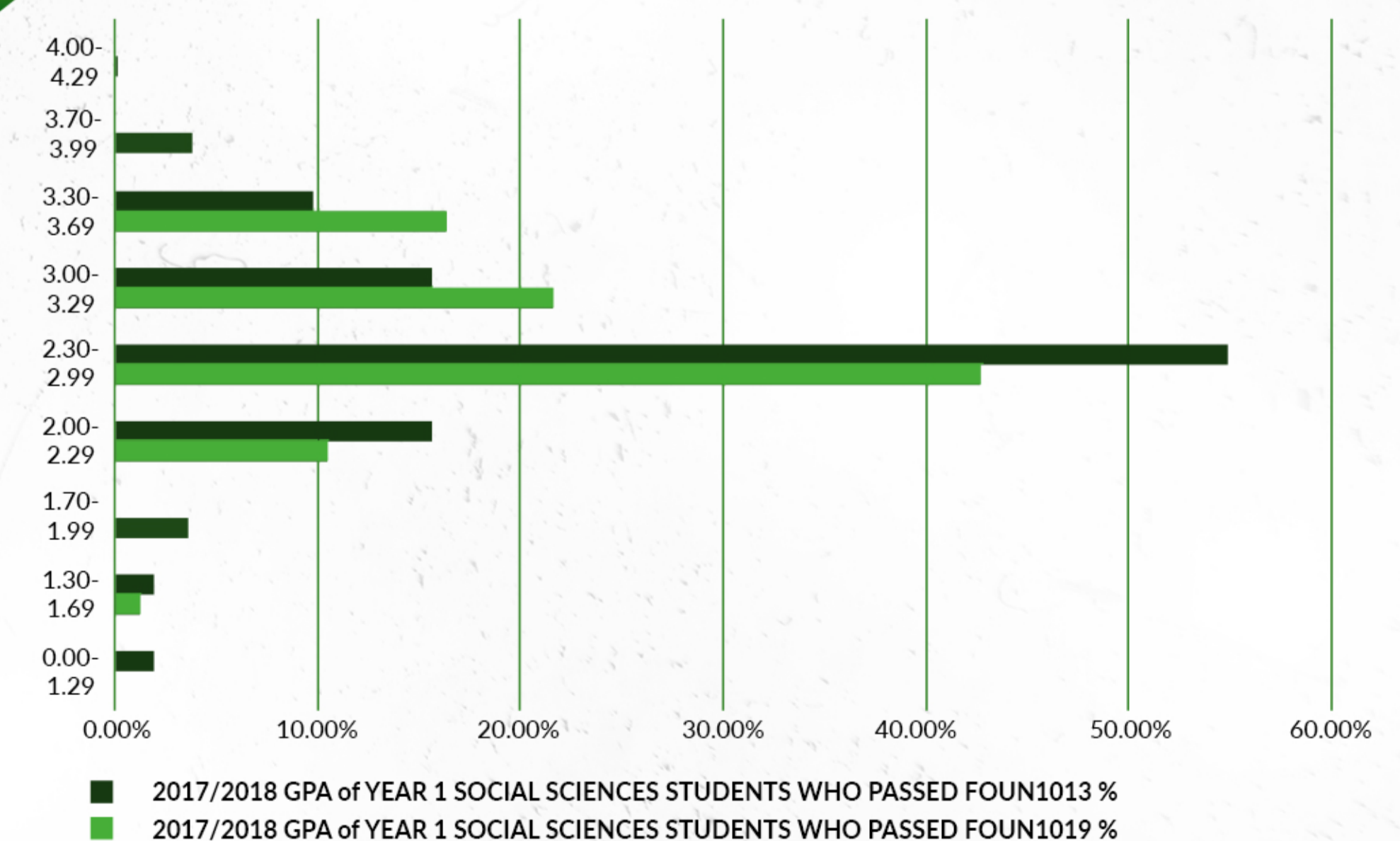
INNOVATIVE FOUN1019 LANGUAGE AWARENESS PEDAGOGY



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PRELIMINARY FINDINGS (Quantitative)

Year 1 Grade Point Average (GPA): Foun1013 vs Foun1019 Social Sciences Students



Interpretation: **Foun 1013** students have Higher GPAs than **Foun 1019** students overall, but Very Similar Outcomes re % of students with Low/Unsatisfactory GPAs (below 2.00).

Thus, student success in the 'general' course is not more associated with Year 1 academic failure than student success in the 'specific' course. It is, however linked to the lower level of 1019 students' Year 1 passing grades.

Grade Point = letter grade numerical value X course credit weighting (re course duration in hours)