

Skills and Success Newsletter

COC College Success Skills
Taskforce

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Where COC Stands with Basic Skills

When the Basic Skills Initiative was announced in late 2007, the Initiative publicized statewide statistics that indicated 70-85 percent of community college students were under-prepared for college level work (“under-prepared,” meaning students placed below college level in English or mathematics or both). Perhaps the statewide data was not relevant for the COC student population? Unfortunately, the statewide data is indicative of our students’ preparation. In fact, data provided by our Office of Institutional Development indicates for Fall 2007, 86 percent of students assessed placed below English 101 and 88 percent placed below Math 102. It appears that we are not so

different from our colleagues across the state.

Now, we must coordinate a plan and activities that will facilitate the improvement of our students’ skills and success. As we develop plans and activities, it will be important to remember that students in need of improving their basic skills are enrolled in courses across the curriculum.



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Why College Skills Matter at COC

In February 2007, ETS (the Educational Testing Service) released a report entitled “The Perfect Storm.” Presented to the National Press Club in Washington D.C., the report outlines three converging forces that will continue to impact our future negatively: declining literacy and numeracy, shifting population demographics powered by an influx of immigrants, and an

increasing need for higher skilled workers. One of their most striking findings: when considering the educational achievement of the world’s 29 most competitive countries, the US ranks 24th. What does all this mean? Essentially, the ETS report concludes that the US will be unable to stay competitive in the current global economy. Here at COC, our mission statement includes

“workforce training for businesses and lifelong learning programs for all who seek those opportunities.” As we strive to help our students achieve their learning and employment goals, we must dedicate our resources to address the decline in literacy and numeracy among all student populations and to create new training programs for tomorrow’s skilled workers.

Special points of interest:

- Learn about the PAL Program
- Get the latest news at the statewide-level
- Read the feature article by Heather MacLean

Spotlight on the PAL Program

The PAL (Personalized Accelerated Learning) Program began this fall and offers those students who need to improve their math and English skills another way to take classes. The PAL Program is based on a cohort model that has the same group of students taking sequential classes with the same instructor. This allows a full immersion into the subject matter, support from your cohort peers and more individualized attention from the instructor. These cohort classes are also paired with a counseling class to provide the students with the

support to succeed in the cohort. Students were invited to participate in this pilot program based on their recent placement test scores. This program specifically helps those students who are faced with taking multiple semesters of pre-college math and English classes before they reach transfer level courses.

While we offered three five-week sessions in the fall, upon review and input from participants, this spring we will be offering the program in two eight week cohorts (i.e. English 081 & 091 or Math 070 & 140). The feedback we have

received from students in the program has been very positive and we look forward to serving even more students in the upcoming semester.

"The PAL Program has allowed me to go back to school while still working full time and achieve my goals through an accelerated learning program tailored toward earning transfer credits."

Joe Efflandt
COC PAL Student

National News on Basic Skills

Nationwide, institutions of higher education are grappling with the challenge of how to bring incoming students up to "college" levels. According to a recent study published in [USA Today](#), one-third of college students nationwide will have to enroll in what are categorized as "remedial courses." More specifically, "Analyzing federal data, the report estimates that 43 percent of community college students and 29 percent of students at public four-year universities require remediation. Four in five Oklahoma community college students need remedial coursework, and three in five in the giant California State University system need help in English, math or both" writes Justin Pope, reporter

for [The Washington Post](#).

There are significant financial costs incurred by these colleges. Colleges nationwide are spending \$2.3 to 2.9 billion annually to help bring students up to college level.

More importantly, though, is the cost to students. With more than sixty percent of university and seventy to eighty percent of community college students testing in with basic skills, the dream of completing a four year degree seems even more out of reach. For students like Christina Jeronimo, a student at Long Beach City College, and Christian Villalta a student at College of the Desert, the path to a four year degree has

been extended by an additional full year of skills classes designed to bring them up to college-level. Facing these types of obstacles, it's easy to see why students are failing to complete their education: "A report from the Legislative Analyst Office found that statewide half of community college students enrolled in basic skills courses in any given term do not return the following fall term" ([The Desert Sun](#)). To confront these numbers, community colleges state- and nationwide are creating Initiatives to help colleges and students overcome these challenges.

[Sources: [USA Today](#), [The Washington Post](#), and [The Desert Sun](#)]

What Students Say About the PAL Program

"The PAL Program is a great way for motivated college students who want to move on to a 4-year college. The class has been preparing us for that fast-paced nature and strict grading. The program has been helpful to me so I don't have to waste my time in a semester-long class that I am capable of doing in five weeks."—Jordan McConnell

"The PAL Program has allowed me to go back to school while still working full time and

achieve my goals through an accelerated learning program tailored toward earning transfer credits. I am a 50 year old student with numerous college credits. The two courses I failed to finish years ago were English and mathematics. I am grateful for the PAL program as it will allow me to achieve my goal of obtaining a college degree." — Joe Efflandt

"The Program is beneficial and

helpful to me. Especially for students that have a hectic schedule, this class offers an efficient way to take up to English 101 in one semester." — Joseph Ha

Basic Skills Conference News by Mary Petersen

If you're like me, you have never heard of a CB21 code. Well, like me before I attended a BSI (that's Basic Skills Initiative) workshop last weekend. Likewise, you may not be familiar with an ARCC report. Yet these cryptic symbols are part of an important change that will be affecting community colleges statewide. A bit of history may be helpful. Subsequent to the state's allocation of \$33 million for the Basic Skills Initiative, AB 194 was passed which required a supplemental report from the Chancellor's office documenting the success and progress of basic skills classes. This is the ARCC report (Accountability Report for Community Colleges).

The ARCC report is dependent in large part on CB21 codes. These codes are used to designate various pre-transfer level courses in math, English, ESL and reading. An "A" code refers to one level below transfer. A "B" code refers to two levels below transfer. A "C" code refers to three levels below transfer. The Chancellor's office uses the CB21 codes to measure student progress between levels of basic

skills courses which is then reported to the state.

The problem is this. There is no consistent coding among community colleges. Some colleges offer courses two levels below transfer in math or English. Some colleges offer three or more levels below transfer. Since there is no uniformity in coding among colleges, a course coded level B at one college might be vastly different from a course coded level B at another college. It's difficult to determine which skills students are achieving at which level throughout the community college system. Therefore, it is difficult to track the progress being made statewide by students within the basic skills sequence.

This is what is needed. Since CB21 is a significant course coding that is used by the Chancellor's office to report basic skills data to the state, we need a statewide matrix which designates uniform descriptions for each level of the CB21 code. Faculty have already begun collaborating to create these

matrices for math, English, reading and ESL. They are currently posted in draft form on the Basic Skills Initiative website and will be disseminated statewide for vetting and review after revisions are made.

The Vice Chancellor of technology and research, Patrick Perry, wants to emphasize that updating CB21 codes does not impose a system of common course numbering among the community colleges. It does not prescribe standardization of curriculum statewide. It does not direct curricular changes at the college level. Rather, it provides uniform, meaningful curricular definitions (or SLOs) for each level below transfer in English, reading, ESL and math. Once these levels are established, colleges will then review their existing courses and determine at which level on the matrix each course most closely aligns. This MIS data will be reported to the Chancellor's office which in turn will report it to the state. In this way, colleges can determine more accurately the effectiveness of their basic skills courses.



The College Success Skills Taskforce Wants You!

The College Success Skills Taskforce is seeking feature articles discussing the various aspects of "Basic Skills" education from all faculty and staff. These articles will be published on the back cover of the College Success Skills Newsletter each semester. Articles should be roughly 500 words in length and can address a broad range of topics including but not limited to using self-assessment to better help basic skills students, understanding cultural and generational differences, bridging the divide between full and part time faculty to better help our basic skills students, and employing active learning in the classroom (just to name a few topics).

Articles for consideration should be sent to Patrick Backes or Audrey Green.

Please see our current feature article "What's in a Name?" written by Heather MacLean, COC ESL professor on the back cover of this issue.

College of the Canyons
College Success Skills Taskforce

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In May 2007 an announcement came out inviting our college, among others, to attend a regional meeting on the Basic Skills Initiative at Mount San Antonio College. That day was the beginning of our participation in the Initiative. Since then a group of faculty, staff and administrators interested in the initiative began the self-assessment process as outlined in the publication [Basic Skills as a Foundation for Student Success in California Community Colleges](#). The self-assessment process took approximately five months to complete. Based on findings from the self-assessment another group developed an Action Plan to direct activities focuses on professional development, curriculum, support services and administration. A College Success Skills Task Force has been created and is now focusing on the action plan priorities for 2008-09. Members of the Task Force include Edel Alonso, Alto Benedicto, Jennifer Brezina, Mitil Capet, Leslie Carr,

What's in a Name?: The College of the Canyons and College Success Skills by Heather MacLean

Basic Skills is a sweeping term and one with which we have been rather battered in recent months. In the past, terms such as remedial and developmental have been used. In the commissioned study report: Basic Skills as a Foundation for Student Success in California Community Colleges (2007), henceforth referred to as the California Basic Skills Report defines basic skills as “those foundation skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and English as a Second Language, as well as learning skills and study skills, which are necessary for students to succeed in college-level work” (p.8). In reality, they are the pre-101 level classes. As community college faculty are more than aware, a 101 class can be defined as an introductory level class in a specific subject. However, key developmental educator H.R. Boylan (2003) presents an additional worthy definition as he describes developmental education as “courses or services provided for the purpose of helping under-prepared college students attain their academic goals. The term “under-prepared students” refers to any students who need to develop their cognitive or affective abilities in order to succeed in a postsecondary educational experience.” (p.8). This definition serves as a worthy expansion of the

former, like a descriptive subtitle. It should be noted that there has been much controversy over what to call students who lack the English and Math literacy skills and the study skills to succeed in college. Remedial is considered offensive in the implication that there is something wrong with such a student and that there is a cure. A preferred term is developmental which implies the student is on his/her way and we are meeting them en route. The term basic skills does fit into the developmental model, implying there are more advanced skills to be reached, and of, once more, a journey in which we are all involved. While one might see the positive within that, the College Success Skills Committee felt that the very term “basic” was in itself a limitation and highlighted a state rather than a goal and a potential. The search for an appropriate name ended in the committee opting for Success Skills because inherent within this title is the goal of all involved – success.

Why Here? Why Now?

College readiness is one of seven national education priorities (U. S. Department of Education, 2000). On the state level, California Community colleges constitute the largest

system of higher education in the world, serving more than 2.5 million students in the 2005-06 academic year. The California Master Plan for Higher Education, adopted in 1960, revised in 1972 and then again in 1984, is the state’s guiding force of higher education. This Master Plan requires that California community colleges provide access to all of the State’s high school graduates and anyone over the age of eighteen who can benefit from instruction.

Therefore, the community college has always been there to fill in the gaps in student learning and it is the “people’s college.” It is this mission and core historical function of assisting under-prepared students to attain the necessary skills to succeed in college-level work and of addressing the needs of a diverse population with vastly varying levels of academic preparation that makes the community college a unique institution. The flexibility and entrepreneurial nature of the institution in general—and of College of the Canyons, in particular—does make it the ideal educational venue to try and address the rather unattractive reality of the basic skills issue.

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