

An Ohlone Story

Basic Skills

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Overview

Well before the current state community college initiative for basic skills improvement, Ohlone College began to mobilize its resources to assess and improve our basic skills courses and program. A key to this effort was the development of a strategic commitment to the Learning College Model in 2003. AU. S. Office of Education Title III grant was awarded to the college, a major goal of which was to improve success rates for students involved in basic skills learning.

During the spring and fall of 2005, a group of faculty and Deans engaged in active dialogue about the basic skills course offerings at Ohlone College. The following conclusions were reached as result of this dialogue: there was little relationship between the placement process and the subsequent instructional process; there was a structural disconnect between the academic advising process and the instructional process; in the reading and writing areas, there were no consistent measures of progress from one level to another; the reading and writing instruction was not integrated, despite the merger of the reading and writing labs; although ESL students enroll in all basic skills areas, ESL courses operated separately from the rest; and the basic skills math courses had internal consistency but were not integrated with the other areas.

As a result of this dialogue, in spring 2006, a Faculty Learning Community was formed to review these findings and set a program of characteristics to pursue. The Learning Community included faculty from mathematics, English, English as a Second Language, Counseling, and a variety of general education disciplines. The Learning Community was coordinate by Vicki Curtis, ESL faculty, and Ilene Katz, Mathematics faculty. The results of the Faculty Learning Community were a set of desired characteristics for a Basic Skills Program at Ohlone College.

- An assessment/placement process that assigns students to appropriate courses based on their scores in English composition, English reading, Mathematics, and ESL.
- Students know of the meaning of their placements and how they pertain to their educational goals.
- Students in basic skills courses have an educational plan that states their ultimate goal, the pathway to attaining their goal, and how the basic skills courses fit into that pathway.
- Students unsure of their ultimate goal receive advising to help them clarify their plan.
- Assessment/placement criteria correspond with content/ progress criteria of basic skills courses.
- Students work in cohorts and learning communities and faculty from the four basic skills areas engage in collaborative teaching to integrate content and methodology.
- There is consistency in assessment of progress from one level to the next in the basic skills areas.
- There is a robust program of supplemental instruction and tutoring.

In order to institutionalize a Basic Skills Program, a Basic Skills Coordination Team was established beginning in fall 2006. This team was made up of deans and faculty from Mathematics, English, English as a Second Language, and Counseling (Ron Quinta, Ahn Nguyen, Mylene Pelimiano, Yvette Niccols, Vicki Curtis, Martha Brown, and Wayne Takakuwa). This team began meeting monthly to develop the Basic Skills Program. In addition, the Chancellor's office of California Community Colleges appropriated additional funding for research and program development in Basic Skills. This funding has provided additional funds needed to develop the Basic Skills program by providing faculty professional development opportunities and specialized tutoring. This group will continue on in 2007-08.

Relationship to College Values

We open access to higher education and actively reach out to underserved populations. We main high standards in our constant pursuit of excellence.

Developing a basic skills program that is more coordinated and more closely related to placement test scores will more successfully meet the needs of the 60-70% of the students who enter Ohlone College. Advising these students to the meaning of the placement scores and creating Learning Communities that focus on developing college level skills will support student success and achievement in the basic skills courses which will then transfer to college level courses. Learning Communities that focus on basic skills linked with a transfer-level, content class has proven to be effective and increase students' success not only in the basic skills courses but in the content class and in succeeding courses.

The development of the LAPSI program for basic skills students also focuses on reaching the under prepared student by providing directed tutoring and supplemental support. The LAPSI tutors attend the basic skills classes so the tutoring can be directly related to the class and the tutor can better meet the needs of the students. Although LAPSI was only started in fall of 2006, the greater success rate of students has already been observed and documented.

The growth of more accurate placements, basic skills learning communities, and LAPSI will insure student success not only in the basic skills but in transfer level classes, and thus, the high standards of Ohlone will be upheld.

Strategic College Goals

Develop across the curriculum the Learning College Model, utilizing methods and technologies that hold the most promise for improving student course and program completion success rates.

Research has shown that a more coordinated basic skills program results in better student retention and success rates; as a result, students more successfully continue in college and are more successful in college/transfer level courses. The Learning College Model encourages involvement by all staff and faculty in learning new techniques, and establishing a Basic Skills Program that builds a program for students that shows the importance and relevance of learning the skills needed for college level courses.

The Basic Skills Coordination Team reports that creating one unit classes in English that focus on skills needed for effective writing, having a coordinator for each of the basic skills courses, adding a writing component to the first day of class to aid in the placement of students in English courses, and implementing an exit exam in the course before transfer level English will aid in improving student success in basic skills courses and then into college level courses.

The Basic Skills Coordination team has read the research and has begun to complete the College Assessment which will provide more and needed information regarding the development of the Basic Skills Program. In fall 2007, the Basic Skills team will attend a state-offered workshop which will further outline the state requirements for developing a coordinated Basic Skills program that includes math as well as English. With the reorganization of Ohlone, the same dean will be in charge of English and math which will be beneficial as the new Basic Skills Program is developed.

Demonstration of the Meeting of One or More of the Accreditation Standards

The ongoing development of the Basic Skills program at Ohlone demonstrates commitment to the following accreditations standards:

II.A. Instructional Programs

1. a. The institution identifies and seeks to meet the varied educational needs of its students through programs consistent with their educational preparation and the diversity, demographics, and economy of its communities. relies upon research and analysis to identify student learning needs and to assess progress toward achieving stated learning outcomes.

1.c. The institution identifies student learning outcomes for courses, programs, certificates, and degrees; assesses student achievement of those outcomes; and uses assessment results to make improvements.

2.assures the quality and improvement ofdevelopmental, and pre-collegiate courses....

d.uses delivery modes and teaching methodologies that reflect the diverse needs and learning styles of its students.

e.evaluates all courses and programs through an on-going systematic review of their relevance, appropriateness, achievement of learning outcomes, currency, and future needs and plans.

3.b. A capability to be a productive individual and life long learner: skills include oral and written communication, information competency, computer literacy, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis/logical thinking, and the ability to acquire knowledge through a variety of means.

II.B. Student Services

3. The institution researches and identifies the learning support needs of its student population and provides appropriate services and programs to address those needs.

e. regularly evaluates admissions and placement instruments and practices to validate their effectiveness while minimizing biases.

The Basic Skills program includes a robust process of assessment of student educational needs and an active system of academic advising. The actual assessment instrument was developed after significant faculty dialogue about the student learning outcomes to be assessed. Faculty are building these student learning outcomes into the curriculum as they work to bring alignment between the initial assessment of a student needs and the subsequent assessment of student progress through the pre-college courses. The focus of the Basic Skills program reinforces the General Education goal of students being capable of being a productive individual and lifelong learning by developing skills in reading, writing, mathematics and critical thinking.

ACCJCWASC Accreditation Themes

Institutional Commitment

The institution has been totally committed to developing and implementing a Basic Skills Program. The commitment began when the first Basic Skills Learning Community for faculty and staff was formed and continued with the forming of the Basic Skill Learning Task Force. All of these measures were taken before the funding by the state for the developing of a Basic Skill Program. The state funding has given the College the opportunity to provide reassigned time to the Basic Skills Team in order for the faculty involved in this to have more time to work on creating the Program.

Evaluation, Planning and Improvement

The College began evaluating its Basic Skills prior to the state's funding in fall 2007. Because of the number of students who enter into Ohlone at the basic skills level, the College has been evaluating the success of basic skill students and planning improvement to guarantee student success not only in the basic skill classes but in transfer level classes.

Student Learning Outcomes

In response to the revised ACCJC Accreditation Standards, the Faculty Senate began the SLOPE group (Student Learning Outcomes Professional Enthusiasts). Details about the work of SLOPE can be read in "An Ohlone Story, A Faculty Driven Approach to Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment." A major accomplishment of this group was the change in the approach to Program and Service Review. Because

of the work of SLOPE, Program and Service Review is based on Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). Subsequent Program Reviews by Mathematics and English showed that both groups recognized basic skills as a program area rather than simply an assemblage of courses. These Program Reviews also pointed to the need for faculty involved in all areas related to basic skills be much more integrated in their approach, and the notion of a Basic Skills "Program" emerged.

The college's emphasis on learning, resulting from the strategic adoption of the Learning College Model and the Faculty Senate's student learning outcomes and assessment initiatives, is at the core of the efforts to develop and improve our Basic skills program. The Basic Skills Learning Task Force has looked at the Student Learning Outcomes in math and English basic skills courses; as a result, they have been developing the program based on the needs of the students.

With these institutional commitments as a foundation, the implementation of the Basic Skills Program began with a review of the reading, writing and mathematics assessment tools. The college had been using the ASSET Placement Exam. Because the ASSET exam's validation was about to end, English faculty, Math faculty, and Counseling faculty conducted a review of the ASSET exam, as well as looking at other options for assessment testing. While faculty felt the ASSET was fairly accurate in placing students into the correct English and Math courses, there was also a belief that a more accurate testing instrument was available. In addition, ASSET was a paper/pencil exam and the College wanted to use a test that could be taken on a computer. Taking a computerized test has several advantages: more than one version is available because the questions appear randomly; students take the test up to their level and then the test stops; students can work at their own speed; and students get their results immediately. Students can also take the test every two weeks because the questions are randomly selected by the computer. This gives students the opportunity to study and/or improve their score because they know more what to expect of the test. After researching the various testing instruments, the decision was made to use ACCUPLACER-developed by the College Board. Before making the final decision on ACCUPLACER three English instructors had the students in their fall 2005 classes take the test in order to establish cut scores for incoming students. ACCUPLACER was then adopted in spring 2006 as the placement test for incoming students.

The ESL Department also wanted to change from a paper/pencil test to a computerized one, so the COMPASS was chosen and validation studies proceeded. The COMPASS includes reading, speaking, and listening tests. The ESL Department also requires a writing sample in order to more accurately place students.