Basic Skills Initiative Steering Committee (BSISC) Minutes
Wednesday, October 19, 2011   3:00pm - 4:00pm
LC109

ATTENDEES
Susan Andrien, Cheo Massion, Jim Arnold, Luz Moreno, Becky Reetz

AGENDA ITEMS

REPORT ON OCTOBER 12 AND 13 STATEWIDE MEETING: STRENGTHENING STUDENT SUCCESS – EMERGING ISSUES IN ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING

Susan reported: The best workshop I attended was “Taking Acceleration to Scale” offered by Katie Hern, who pioneered acceleration of the English sequence at Chabot and Myra Snell, who accelerated the math sequence at Los Medanos College. Both are leaders of the California Acceleration Project, whose goal is to support California’s 112 community colleges to redesign their English and Math curricula and increase student completion. They are supported by a number of foundations.

Their logic goes like this: research has clearly established that the more levels of remedial courses a student must take, the lower their chances of completing college-level English and Math. We can’t keep attributing this problem to students’ low skills: we need to look at the sequences and how they are taught. The longer the sequence, the more “exit points” (points at which students drop out, either by not passing one level or by not enrolling in a subsequent level) there are.

The Acceleration Project asserts several strong values: first, the transfer level of the course should not change. Second, design curriculum that will render students capable of success in the transfer level course. For example, the transfer level in math for almost all basic skills students is Statistics. Student success in statistics does not require much (if any) algebra. Yet most colleges require their basic skills students to complete one, two or even three algebra courses. Acceleration Project colleges have greatly improved their students’ success rates in the Statistics course by designing the preparatory course simply to prepare students to succeed in Stats. This “backwards design” gives students the skills they need to transfer without so many exit points to fall through.

Another key principle is “just in time” remediation rather than “front loaded” remediation. This means that whatever skill a student needs to do well in the college level course is taught when it is needed, in contrast to the approach that breaks down the skills into discrete sub-skills that are delivered in a linear, step by step curriculum. This means “immersing students in challenging authentic literacy and quantitative tasks and providing targeted reviews of foundational skills at the moment they are relevant to the higher-order work at hand” (Acceleration News).

The Acceleration Project also involves a critique of placement testing—students rarely understand the stakes of placement tests and are seldom prepared to do their best. These tests measure only decontextualized sub-skills and fail to capture the broader affective and cognitive dimensions of college readiness. There are gross misalignments between what is tested and what is needed for success in a
given academic pathway. And finally, the tests lead us to underestimate the capacity of low-scoring students—who have demonstrated in Acceleration Project courses their ability to handle complex challenging tasks.

I asked about faculty fears of losing units, but in this environment where we do not offer enough sections of basic skills courses to meet student need, that is less of an issue.

**ADDITIONAL REFERENCES TO INFORMATION ON ACCELERATION OF REMEDIAL SEQUENCES**

Here’s the link to the California Report that Luz told us about on May 25.

http://www.californiareport.org/archive/R201105250850/b

http://toped.svefoundation.org/2011/05/10/remaking-remedial-education/

And from Katie Hern: Colleges interested in implementing accelerated English and Math should check out the resources posted at the California Community Colleges’ Success Network (3CSN)

http://3csn.org/developmental-sequences/

One more link: http://toped.svefoundation.org/2011/05/09/abandon-hope-all-ye-who-enter-here/

Looks like the Silicon Valley Education Foundation has some good/worthwhile information.

Minutes Submitted on October 30, 2011 by Cheo Massion