Minutes of the Basic Skills Sub-Committee (BSSC) Meeting
December 5, 2011
Co-Chairs Andrew King and Elizabeth Zarubin

1. Minutes from the Previous Meeting
The minutes from the previous meeting (November 14) were sent via BSSC listserv to members of the BSSC. Minor corrections were made by co-chair Elizabeth Zarubin and the minutes were approved by the committee.

2. Discussion of Reading in the Disciplines: the Challenges of Adolescent Literacy: Introduction and Overview (author?)
What we learned:
- Reading of all kinds must build on prior knowledge.
- Reading comprehension presents a circular problem: A lack of content knowledge impedes comprehension of texts. A lack of comprehension impedes the acquisition of content knowledge.
- Comprehension of science texts requires knowledge of math, visual literacy, familiarity with tables, diagrams, and technical vocabulary, and facility in abstract reasoning.
- An examination of history texts reveals that attempts to lower readability indices can result in lower comprehensibility because of the removal of cohesive devices and subordinated information.
- History teachers are better able to teach reading in their discipline than are generic reading teachers.
- To comprehend literature, students need relevant historical/cultural background. Their comprehension can be impeded by difficult syntax or vocabulary. They can benefit from connections to their own experience.
- Students in all disciplines can benefit from class activities that build content knowledge prior to reading.
- Content area instructors need to provide more support to their students in the reading process.

What we still want to know:
- How common is it for CCSF instructors to teach reading strategies?
- What sort of textbooks do CCSF history instructors assign?
- Can the texts of other disciplines be examined in similar ways?
- What are the best approaches to building knowledge prior to reading?
- What is the correct balance between content and process instruction?

3. Discussion of “Content area reading in community college classrooms.” Margaret J. Maaka and Shr M. Ward
What we learned:
- Both instructors and students can be surveyed about reading strategies, motivations, and comprehension.
- Motivation is a separate factor in reading and needs to be addressed at the community college level.
• Successful academic reading is based on independence, synthesis, organization, interpretation, and application.
• Content-area instructors are experts in teaching reading in their disciplines.
• Instructors need to introduce students to multiple ways of reading and writing, to be guides rather than transmitters of information, and to facilitate collaborative learning.
• The discrepancy between student and instructor perceptions indicates that we need to clarify the goals of reading in the disciplines.
• Students need to facilitate their own independent learning.
• Instructors need to challenge their perception of how students learn and they need to seek student input in planning reading instruction.

What we still want to know:
• What inspires motivation to read in community college courses?
• How is comprehension of the readings assessed in CCSF courses?
• How do we add instructional support in reading to courses in which content cannot be reduced?
• What are some practical strategies to teach students to read independently?
• If students had a strong understanding of vocabulary, would they enjoy reading more?
• How do we address discrepancies between instructor and student perceptions?

4. Articles were distributed for reading prior to the first meeting in Spring 2012.

BSSC Attendees:
Anne Cassia, Erin Denney, Lorelie Leung, Alex Leyton, Chante McCormick, Caroline Mirkowski, Sara Peterson, Cindy Slates, Laura Walsh, Elizabeth Zarubin