

# City College of San Francisco

## Basic Skills Subcommittee Recommendation to the Academic Policies Committee

### Collaborative for Teaching, Learning, and Student Success in Basic Skills\*

May 2005

#### Goals

The Basic Skills Committee seeks to:

- Improve basic skills student success rates so that each ethnic, gender, and disability group's success rates will be comparably high with no more than a 5% variance between each group.
- Improve motivation, persistence, community, and peer involvement of basic skills students.
- Increase faculty commitment to and satisfaction from working with basic skills students.

#### Summary

To achieve these goals, the members of the Basic Skills Committee seek to provide the best possible environment in which to promote student success. After spending almost two years surveying the literature on basic skills students; eliciting ideas and experience from teaching and counseling faculty, students, staff, and administrators; and exploring issues of multiculturalism and alternative pedagogies, the Basic Skills Committee proposes a two-pronged approach:

- 1) Increase training for our City College community; and,
- 2) Improve student programs and support services.

These issues are addressed in the first two recommendations which follow regarding professional development programming and coordinated programs and services for basic skills students. However, as change occurs it will begin to reshape our institutional structure, so the third recommendation, the Collaborative for Teaching, Learning and Student Success in Basic Skills, addresses the structural issue. Except where noted, it is the Collaborative which will implement the approved recommendations.

#### Background

In 2001, as part of the Title III grant, basic skills faculty and department chairs came together to discuss issues related to basic skills. During October 2003, they decided to invigorate the Basic Skills Committee, an already existing, but inactive, sub-committee of the Academic Policies Committee. Currently, 30-50 instructional and counseling faculty, staff, students, and administrators regularly attend meetings, and more than 150 people are on the Basic Skills Committee listserv. Over the past two years, the members of the Basic Skills Subcommittee have:

Fall 03	Conducted a literature review of best practices in basic skills
Spring 04	Shared the best practices of basic skills and counseling departments, retention programs, and student support services, as well as programs such as the Mentoring Program and Multicultural Infusion Project.
Fall 04	Explored the interconnectedness between basic skills and diversity initiatives and issues, including a <i>California Tomorrow</i> presentation on student experience in our community colleges.
Spring 05	Explored collaborative learning, piloted faculty reflective teaching circles and prepared our recommendations.

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\* No phrase or term is completely satisfactory here. After extensive deliberation the committee settled on "basic skills"—rather than developmental education, remedial education, pre-collegiate, or a host of others—because it is the phrase the college uses to describe the students we are trying to address. The committee is aware that it is a problematic term and we await the creation of better language to describe these issues.

## **Best practices for Basic Skills**

On the basis of the work of the Committee, the following best practices have been identified:

- A basic skills program should be comprehensive and coordinated, providing instruction and support services which are holistic, integrated among related departments and programs, and well articulated with a strong institutional commitment, adequate funding, and high expectations.
- A basic skills program should include a systematic, ongoing, cross-disciplinary program of professional development for faculty and staff within and beyond the basic skills program.
- A basic skills program should be positive toward cultural difference, responsive to specific cultural needs, and empowering to students.
- Instructional and counseling faculty who work with basic skills students should self-select based on interest and enthusiasm.
- A basic skills program should be integrated with an array of academic support programs including tutoring, mentoring, study groups, college success support, linked classes, workshops, counseling, and tech support.
- Basic skills classrooms and support services should employ a variety of pedagogies and instructional methods, connecting with every student regardless of gender, culture, ability, or learning style.
- A basic skills program should have a well-defined sequence and linkages of courses with identified objectives and content which connects to students' life experiences whenever possible.
- Departments and programs that work with basic skills students should communicate and coordinate with one another.
- A basic skills program should have clearly delineated responsibilities, expectations and outcomes.
- A basic skills program should have built-in systems for feedback, evaluation, and improvement.

## **Guiding principles: Students and Student Learning at the Core**

Students and their success are the focus of our work. Therefore, we should understand who our basic skills students are and what they need, using that understanding to guide our decisions.

That said, students and their perspectives should be fundamental to everything we do. Students can contribute in many ways—as members of planning committees, as peer tutors and mentors, and as role models of success—establishing connections with their peers, instructors, and counselors. It is our individual and institutional responsibility to create opportunities for students to share their views about their education and for us to listen to them as we build our program to enhance their learning.

Almost half of our incoming students place into basic skills courses. In the fall of 2002, that was 1,670 students. As a group, they represent multiple cultures: Asian/Pacific Islander (38%), Latino/a (23%), African-American/Non-Latino/a (13%), Filipino (10%), European-American/Non-Hispanic (10%), American Indian/Alaskan Native (1%), and various other cultures (4%). In addition, basic skills students represent every gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, ability, and socioeconomic class.

Since basic skills students are so diverse, cultural competence must be among our primary goals as individuals and as an institution. Indeed, research shows that cultural competence, including attention to learning styles and cultural differences, has a direct impact on student success. Our students' life experiences may differ radically from each other and from that of their instructors, counselors, and support staff. We recognize that each of them comes to City College with a unique set of intellectual, psychological, emotional, and physical skills that can be developed and can enrich every aspect of our institution. Therefore, it is imperative that we learn to work across cultures more effectively.

These principles inform and infuse the recommendations of the Basic Skills Committee which follow:

- Create and foster a permanent professional development program
- Create coordinated programs and services for basic skills students
- Create the “Collaborative for Teaching, Learning, and Student Success in Basic Skills”

## **Recommendation 1: Create and foster a permanent professional development program**

A highly trained faculty does the best job teaching and working with basic skills students. Moreover, research and common sense reinforce the conclusion that the “best practice” pedagogies and methodologies that work with basic skills populations are successful with most students.

While many of our faculty have sought high-quality professional development programs and activities to help them learn successful practices and pedagogies, such programs are hard to find, and obtaining institutional support is challenging given recent budgetary problems.

A broad-based and permanent change in basic skills ideas and practices requires full-fledged institutional support to improve classroom practices and increase our long-held commitment to improve the success of our basic skills students.

All of this means that training and support for basic skills faculty and staff need to be:

- Current—whenever possible representing “best” and highly validated practices
- Systematic—reflected in all units and at all levels of the City College community
- Continuing—part of a permanent program for student success
- Culturally competent—reflecting the students that we serve.

While tenured faculty are not compelled to participate in professional development and retraining regarding basic skills, the hope is that the quality of the professional development opportunities and their impact on student success, coupled with incentives, will make training and learning exceptionally attractive, garnering high levels of faculty participation overall.

To that end, the Committee proposes two components to the faculty development program. The first component is an intensive Institute—especially focused on new faculty, but open to all—for faculty orientation and development and the second addresses on-going development and training.

### **Basic Skills Faculty Development Institute program**

Both full time and part time teaching instructional and counseling faculty could participate in the Collaborative’s faculty development institute program. Faculty working intensively with basic skills students will be especially encouraged to participate in this voluntary program. This intensive and in-depth program will be a two-semester commitment consisting of pre-semester trainings, retreats, and monthly seminars that can include a schedule and topics such as those below:

Prior to, or near the beginning of the first semester:

- 1 Pre-Semester Training and/or a 1-Day Retreat:
- The Basic Skills Student: Myths, Realities, Challenges
- Creating & Sustaining the Positive Learning Environment
- Diversity in the Classroom
- Classroom Assessment Techniques

Prior to, or near the beginning of the second semester:

- 1 Pre-Semester Training and/or a 1-Day Retreat:
- Culture and Learning
- Teaching Multilingual Students
- Reinforcing/Enhancing Basic Skills Across Disciplines
- Collaborative Learning Strategies

Mid-End of first semester:

- 2 three-hour trainings a month apart:
- Course and Lesson organization that works for students
- Working with the disabled students in the classroom
- Critical Pedagogy I
- Building Student Support Services into Class Design I
- Successful Syllabus Design

Mid-End of second semester:

- 2 three-hour trainings a month apart:
- Critical Pedagogy II
- Building Student Support Services into Class Design II
- Measuring Student Learning
- Tech-based models that support student learning

## **On-going professional development program**

On-going professional development activities for both new and continuing teaching and counseling faculty and staff should create a sense of community and support for experimentation and innovation using new pedagogies and problem solving strategies to increase student learning and development. Such activities might take many forms:

- Intensive semester-long and year-long in-depth professional development activities modeled on successful programs such as the Multicultural Infusion Project, SCANS, Reflective Teaching Circles, Carnegie Academies, and Paired Coaching. Topics could include pieces from the Faculty Development Institute program above.
- Short/long-term and one-time only workshops, reading groups, brown bag lunch programs, panels, social gatherings, student-story discussions, etc.
- Topics for both intensive programs and short term workshops such as: classroom assessment techniques, active and collaborative learning strategies, learning styles, study and reading skills integration, lesson planning, student learning outcomes and the course syllabus, syllabus and lesson plan design, classroom management techniques, teaching in multilingual and culturally diverse classrooms, integration of critical thinking strategies, supporting students' special needs, disabled students in the classroom, strategies to integrate counseling and other student support services, technology use for basic skills students, service learning, etc.
- Single workshops on the above topics might be offered in collaboration with the FLEX Professional Development Program.
- Off-campus professional development activities, such as conferences.
- Departmentally-focused programs that address the needs of a single department, or group of departments, perhaps integrating counseling services, reinforcing connections between credit and non-credit offerings, promoting diversity initiatives, intensifying academic support, or increasing academic literacy.
- A proposal process encouraging faculty to request small grants for their own professional development initiatives.

These on-going programs should encourage inter-disciplinary and inter-divisional, as well as intra-disciplinary, participation; we all teach the same students and such collaboration will help innovation flourish.

## **Incentive program**

A detailed incentive program developed in consultation with the Academic Senate, AFT 2121, and the Administration that will work within the requirements of the language in the new faculty contract is essential to sustain involvement in the professional development program. Guidelines for "prior approval" status for other professional development activities acceptable for salary column advancement as required on the AFT2121 Professional Development Plan Form should be developed in concert with this effort while similar opportunities are explored with SEIU 790 for classified staff. Further, additional incentives for successful completion of all seminars in the program can be considered, some of which might include salary column advances, stipends, and/or reduced basic skills class sizes.

## **Recommendation 2: Create coordinated programs and services for basic skills students**

Basic skills students frequently struggle with their courses and for a variety of reasons. They may have self-doubts and unrealistic expectations, and can be unprepared to succeed in the very courses they came to college to take. In fact, the necessity of taking prerequisites may mean that students cannot enroll in the courses related to their goals for several semesters. For example, a prospective nursing student must pass at least Basic Math before being officially admitted to the program. Similarly, a student interested in psychology or history may be held back from pursuing those classes until completing one or more English classes. To some extent this is unavoidable; often college students must complete prerequisites before taking the courses they really want. However, when faced with multiple semesters of pre-collegiate work, followed by several more semesters of courses before receiving a certificate or transferring, it is easy to see why students lose motivation and drop out. We are seeking ways of helping basic skills students take and succeed in college-level courses earlier to provide more tangible, nearer-in-time motivation for mastering basic skills.

City College already has a wide array of student support services—tutoring, mentoring, counseling, health care, book loan, etc.—through which we try to communicate that we care about students’ success and help them achieve it. However, too many students are not aware of the services they can use or do not find the services most appropriate for them. To that end we propose a series of strategies to integrate instruction and services.

### **A mission statement connected to goals and outcomes**

Develop a mission statement that connects directly with goals and student learning outcomes. A sample mission statement might be: “Provide students with a coordinated curriculum for basic skills courses, culturally-competent and enthusiastic instructors and counselors, and comprehensive support services that engage and challenge them as learners.”

### **Student-centered support services**

Support student-led study groups and study groups with faculty/staff assistance. Although not all attempts to create such groups at City College have been successful in the past, the literature suggests that peer groups are extremely effective at promoting community, improved study habits, increased retention, and overall success. We will continue to search for models that will bring students together to support one another. Tutoring, mentoring, and counseling have proven records of success at City College and such programs focused specifically on basic skills students can be extremely effective, as can the development of computer labs to support basic skills courses in English, ESL and math in collaboration with the lab coordinators.

### **Links between student development and basic skills courses**

Promote a seamless matriculation and enrollment process that links with academic courses, and acclimates new students and students transferring from the noncredit division to the learning environment up-front so students are prepared for learning. Interdivisional collaboration will insure student success.

### **Links between basic skills courses and college-level courses**

Explore linking arithmetic and/or algebra courses with introductory science courses, and reading, writing, and ESL courses with history or psychology courses. Such links allow students to pursue college-level material while getting the skills support they need. Activities in each class reinforce the material for the other, potentially enriching the experience for students and instructors in both classes while improving students’ motivation and relevant skills. These links can be formal or informal, or they can take the form of organized/facilitated study groups. Counselors can be formally or informally assigned to each set of linked courses. Counselors can give presentations, and instructional faculty can give credit for meeting with the counselor outside of class time.

### **Links between college success and other courses and academic support services**

Links with college success might take many forms. They can be as simple as having college success instructors visit classes a few times per semester to build on and complement the orientation for basic skills students. Other links might promote increased connections between students, counselors, instructors, peer tutors and mentors and other support providers. Long-term, such collaborations between college success instructors and academic content instructors lead to integrating college success skills into content courses. Studies show such integration is the most effective way of teaching college success skills. Content instructors can then reinforce the importance of such skills at all levels, increasing chances for success. Library and technology skills are other potential areas for inclusion in appropriate courses.

### **Links between credit and non-credit courses**

Links among such courses improve the interface between credit and non-credit courses by increasing collaboration and communication among relevant instructors and departments. This eases the transition for students as they enter credit coursework and creates more satisfying classroom environments for students and faculty, alike. Include counseling faculty for additional support for transitioning students.

### **Improved and extended orientation for new basic skills students and students transferring from noncredit**

Basic skills and non-credit transfer students might participate in an extended orientation to City College and the programs and services available to them through a one-day event prior to the start of their first semester at City College. Even more effective might be a longer-term orientation in smaller doses periodically throughout the first semester or first year in the credit division. Whatever the format, the orientation can address the needs of new and reentry students, and students might receive college credit for this orientation. Special sections of this orientation can be made available for ESL students, with special attention to programs and services for them. Topics might include:

- First semester planning and goal setting
- A comprehensive introduction to counseling and other student and academic support services
- A campus tour, emphasizing support services
- A “how to use the library” tour with hands-on exercise
- A self-assessment tool for students to know more about how they learn and the kinds of support they may need
- Explanation and promotion of linked courses
- Educational options and career development

The Basic Skills Committee is aware that similar efforts are going forward under the auspices of the New Student Counseling Department and supports those efforts.

### **Promotion of programs and services for basic skills students**

A regular, short newsletter updating available basic skills support services can be published regularly. This can be as simple as a few extra pages in the course schedule, or it might be more effective as a stand-alone publication. The Committee supports the effort of the Student Development Division in publishing the Student Services map.

A website for basic skills instructor support with college success strategies, collaborative learning strategies, and more is encouraged. The Basic Skills Committee is aware that such a website is currently being developed with Title III monies and supports that effort.

### **Recommendation 3: Create the “Collaborative for Teaching, Learning, and Student Success in Basic Skills”**

Recommendations 1 and 2 require extensive coordination and leadership. Research consistently indicates that colleges with the most successful basic skills programs and outcomes have exceptionally high coordination of basic skills courses, faculty training, and student support services. At City College, we believe a structure that can coordinate basic skills courses, programs, and services across the college might look like the following:

#### **Create a new unit: “Collaborative for Teaching, Learning, and Student Success in Basic Skills”**

Create an office for the Collaborative with one or more (instructional and/or counseling) faculty coordinators, and/or a director, and/or a dean, as well as classified staff, a budget for professional development activities, incentives and supplies. This office might report directly to the Chancellor or Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, and could stand alone or be incorporated into a larger program structure.

Responsibilities might include:

- Bring stakeholders together, keep them focused on the goals of these recommendations, and, together with all parties, develop new goals as appropriate
- Foster student involvement and ensure that students’ and their learning remain the focus of all basic skills programs and services
- Lead the Professional Development Program and maintain listings of approved outside coursework and training
- Facilitate coordination and communication among basic skills departments and stakeholders, including “non-basic skills” departments, counselors, classified staff, administrators, and students
- Work closely with deans, directors, department chairs, designated basic skills coordinators, classroom faculty, the Office of Research Planning and Grants, and other relevant parties to evaluate the success of students, courses, programs, and services
- Provide for links among basic skills courses, college success courses, and college level courses
- Coordinate with academic support services to increase support offerings for basic skills courses
- Work with the Office of Research, Planning, and Grants to secure funding to support basic skills initiatives
- Chair the Advisory Council

#### **Create the Collaborative’s Advisory Council**

The Collaborative’s Advisory Council might consist of 20 members with the responsibility to provide general direction to the Collaborative and assist in the evaluation of programs and services, maintaining the goals of these recommendations as the measures of success.

Additional duties for the Advisory Council might include: crafting cross-departmental and college-wide basic skills policies and initiatives in both credit and non-credit areas; prioritizing resources among basic skills departments and programs, facilitating communication and support among stakeholders; and forming subcommittees as needed to focus on specific issues, such as connections to counseling, cultural competence, and credit-noncredit issues.

Chaired by the head of the Collaborative, the membership on the Council might include one representative from each of the following areas, along with two administrative representatives (one each from Academic Affairs and Student Development) and two student representatives:

Math, English, ESL, Transitional Studies and another academic department  
The Diversity Committee and the Learning Assistance Center  
New Student Counseling and Continuing Student Counseling  
DSPS and EOPS  
AASP, LSN, and APASS  
Classified staff

Through the membership of the Council, communication, collaboration, and impact will be assured. Increased coordination will allow for regular opportunities to analyze student success, to identify and share best practices, and to distribute support services to the widest possible Basic Skills student population.