CSM Student Academic Success:
English and Reading Basic Skills
Course Completion Rates Fall 1993 - Spring 1997

INTRODUCTION
This report presents information on the performance of College of San Mateo [CSM] in fulfilling its mission of meeting the educational needs of students. It is part of a series of accountability reports which address both State and local interests in institutional performance. In general, these accountability reports follow a format developed by the State Chancellor’s Office.

This particular report focuses on the accountability area pertaining to student academic success as measured by successful course completion in English and Reading basic skills classes.

DEFINITION OF MEASURE
The ‘successful course completion rate’ is defined by regulation as “the proportion of students attempting a class who receive an official end-of-term letter grade of A, B, C, or Credit.”

‘Basic skills coursework’ is defined as courses that are credit-bearing but the units do not count toward the Associate Degree.

The data presented are student success rates for eight consecutive academic terms, Fall 1993 through Spring 1997 [Summer sessions are excluded from the analysis]. This report analyzes the academic performance of 14,352 CSM students [duplicated count] enrolled in basic skills English and Reading courses.

For purposes of comparison, total course completion rates for all CSM coursework and Statewide totals for all basic skills coursework is presented. The report also examines basic skills course completion rates for ethnic, gender, and age subpopulations.

Figure 1
COURSE COMPLETION RATES
ENGLISH & READING BASIC SKILLS vs. TOTAL CSM ENROLLMENT
Fall 1993 - Spring 1997
(8 Semester Average)
The course completion rates for CSM students enrolled in English and Reading courses is 57.7% and 58.6%, respectively. [See Figure 1] These data indicate that basic skills students are less likely to successfully complete their coursework than the Collegewide average completion rate for all courses.

Statewide Comparison. Figure 2 presents the most recent available basic skills course completion data for all California Community Colleges--60.1%. This percentage closely approximates CSM’s English and Reading basic skills completion rates [57.7% and 58.6%].

Ethnicity--English Basic Skills. Asian and White students earn the highest successful course completion rates in English coursework at 62.7% and 61.5%, respectively. [See Figure 3] Successful course completion rates for other groups are as follows: Filipino - 55.6% Hispanic - 53.3% Pacific Islander - 50.6% African American - 45.6%.

Ethnicity--Reading Basic Skills. Asian and Filipino students earn the highest successful course completion rates in Reading coursework at 68.1% and 60.3%, respectively. [See Figure 3] Successful course completion rates for other groups are as follows: Hispanic - 57.9% White - 57.7% Pacific Islander - 55.1% African American - 40.5%.

Gender. Figure 4 displays completion rates by gender. These data indicate that female students successfully complete basic skills coursework at a rate greater than that of male students in both English and Reading: 62.2%/64.4% vs. 53.5%/52.2%, respectively.

Age. Students 30 years or older successfully complete English and Reading coursework at a significantly greater rate than younger students. [See Figure 5]

CONCLUSION

The rate at which students complete basic skills coursework in English and Reading is one of the most fundamental measures of how well a community college carries out its instructional mission. The data presented in this report indicate that students enrolled in English and Reading basic skills coursework are much less likely to successfully complete [12 - 13 percentage points] their course of study than the overall CSM student population. This data also indicates significant differences in course completion rates for different student subpopulations--viz, ethnicity, gender, and age.

How does the performance of students in CSM’s basic skills courses compare with Statewide and national figures? Because the structure of the basic skills English and Reading curriculum varies by institution, exact Statewide and national comparison data is not available. However, aggregate national and Statewide basic skills data [variously defined], indicate...
that CSM students successfully complete their coursework at approximately the same rate as that of their counterparts across the United States and at all other California Community Colleges.

High rates of non-completion in basic skills or remedial coursework has long been the norm at both two-year and four-year postsecondary educational institutions throughout the United States and California. However, we cannot be complacent about such figures, especially as the continuing expansion of open access higher education [i.e., the Community Colleges] brings more under-prepared students needing basic skills and remedial coursework.

Beyond the data presented in this report, it is recognized that quantitative measures such as course completion rates do not capture the totality of learning and teaching that takes place in CSM classrooms--especially basic skills classrooms. Those familiar with the educational enterprise fully understand the shortcomings of efforts to capture educational quality with any single statistical measure. The inadequacy of single statistical measures of educational quality is even more apparent when applied to the context of basic skills coursework. Remedial education in the postsecondary context is acknowledged by many educators to be of the most difficult sort. The task of trying to educate students who have--for whatever complex set of reasons--not learned much in twelve years or more of conventional schooling, is an extremely daunting task.

Notwithstanding the above, rates of course completion are among the most commonly agreed upon measures of community college effectiveness. Accordingly, this report is intended to provide some useful measures by which to assess our efforts to help students realize their educational objectives.

Future CSM Research Briefs will analyze the course completion rates of students enrolled in mathematics basic skills coursework and ESL coursework for non-native speakers of English.

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**Basic Skills Courses Included in Study:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ENGL 801, “Basic Writing Skills” [1 units]</td>
<td>READ 800, “Preparation for College Study and Reading” [3 units]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENGL 830, “Writing for Dental Assistants” [1.5 units]</td>
<td>READ 801, “Introduction to Study Skills and College Reading” [3 units]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENGL 850, “Writing Workshop” [5 - 3 units]</td>
<td>READ 802, “Academic Success Strategies and Advanced College Reading” [3 units]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>READ 812, “Individualized Reading Improvement” [5 - 3 units]</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Figure 4**

**ENGLISH & READING BASIC SKILLS COURSEWORK COMPLETION RATE**

**BY GENDER**

Fall 1993 - Spring 1997

(8 Semester Average)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>English Coursework (N=11,106)</th>
<th>Reading Coursework (N=3,179)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>53.5%</td>
<td>52.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>62.2%</td>
<td>64.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5**

**ENGLISH & READING BASIC SKILLS COURSEWORK COMPLETION RATE**

**BY AGE**

Fall 1993 - Spring 1997

(8 Semester Average)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>English %</th>
<th>Reading %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19 or less</td>
<td>59.9%</td>
<td>54.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 - 30</td>
<td>53.7%</td>
<td>55.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 - 39</td>
<td>63.7%</td>
<td>70.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 or above</td>
<td>63.7%</td>
<td>67.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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