CSM Student Academic Success: ESL 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 ESL classes. Data regarding the academic performance of ESL students is increasingly important to the College. Such information is especially important given that the number of immigrant students and other non-native speakers of English enrolling at CSM has steadily increased during the past ten years. This change in the student population poses new challenges and opportunities.

DEFINITION OF MEASURE

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

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 6,045 students [duplicated count] enrolled in the following ESL coursework:

ENGL 841, 842, 843, 844
[“Writing for Non-Native Speakers I, II, III, IV”]
ENGL 400
[“Composition for Non-Native Speakers”]
READ 841, 842, 843
[“Reading for Non-Native Speakers I, II, III”]
READ 807
[“Basic Phonics Skills for Non-Native Speakers”]
SPCH 841, 842, 843
[“Conversation for Non-Native Speakers I, II, III”]

Figure 1

COURSE COMPLETION RATE
ESL COURSEWORK vs. total CSM Enrollments
FALL 1993 - SPRING 1997 (8 SEMESTER AVERAGE)
For purposes of comparison, total course completion rates for all CSM coursework is presented. The report also examines CSM ESL course completion rates for ethnic, gender, and age sub-populations.

**SUCCESSFUL COURSE COMPLETION: FALL 1993 - SPRING 1997**

- The course completion rates for CSM students enrolled in ESL English, Reading, and Speech courses is 70.2%, 63.7%, and 71.1%, respectively. [See Figure 1]
- Collegewide Comparison. In comparison, the Collegewide average completion rate for all courses during the same time period is 70.3%. This figure closely approximates CSM’s ESL-English and ESL-Speech course completion rates. In contrast, the ESL-Reading course completion rate is nearly 7 percentage points lower than the Collegewide average.
- Ethnicity--English Composition. Asian and White students earn the highest successful course completion rates in ESL-English coursework at 78.5% and 76.9%, respectively. [See Figure 2] Successful course completion rates for other groups are as follows: Filipino - 72.7% and Hispanic - 59.8%.
- Ethnicity--Reading. Similarly, Asian and White students earn the highest successful course completion rates in ESL-Reading coursework at 70.7% and 68.5%, respectively. [See Figure 2] Successful course completion rates for other groups are as follows: Filipino - 65.9% and Hispanic - 56.5%.
- Ethnicity--Speech. Filipino and White students earn the highest successful course completion rates in ESL-Speech coursework at 79.2% and 77.1%, respectively. [See Figure 2] Successful course completion rates for other groups are as follows: Asian - 76.4% and Hispanic - 63.5%.
- Gender. Figure 3 displays completion rates by gender. These data indicate that female students successfully complete ESL coursework at a rate greater than that of male students in English Reading and Speech: 74.8%/67.7%/74.5% vs. 64.4%/57.7%/65.5%, respectively.
- Age. Younger students [19 years old or less] successfully complete ESL-English and ESL-Reading coursework at a greater rate than older students. [See Figure 4] However, older students [31 - 39 years of age] complete ESL-Speech courses at a greater rate than their younger counterparts.
CONCLUSION

The rate at which students complete basic skills coursework is one of the most fundamental measures of how well a community college carries out its instructional mission. 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.

The data presented in this report indicate that students enrolled in ESL-English Composition and ESL-Speech coursework successfully complete their course of study at a rate that closely approximates or slightly exceeds that of the overall CSM student population. However, ESL-Reading students are somewhat less likely to successfully complete their course of study compared to the other two components of the ESL curriculum and the total CSM student population. This data also indicates significant differences in course completion rates for different student sub-populations—viz., ethnicity, gender, and age.

The academic success of ESL students is increasingly significant as the expansion of open access higher education brings increasing numbers of immigrant students and other non-native speakers of English. In order to provide the appropriate instruction in English as a second language [ESL], we need accurate information about these students. CSM’s ESL program offers non-native speakers of English a course of study fitted to individual abilities in various skill areas. Two assessment instruments [a writing sample and an objectively scored reading test] are administered to new students prior to enrolling in classes. Assessment result yields an ESL course placement recommendation. The ESL curriculum contains up to five English skill levels—prior to enrollment in college-level composition [ENGL 100].

The cultural, linguistic, and educational diversity of the CSM ESL population is stunning. A recent study found that currently enrolled ESL students come from 60 different countries and speak 46 different languages. Many ESL students are relatively recent arrivals to the United States. Nearly one-third [32.4%] of students have lived in the United States two years or less; 67.6% have lived here 5 years or less. The educational background of ESL students is similarly diverse: more than one-third [35.3%] of students have no formal schooling in the United States; 28.8% have attended adult education classes; 22.5% have completed high school; and 13.4% have attended another college or university within the United States. However, ESL students have considerably higher levels of educational attainment outside of the United...
States: 41.3% have attended or graduated from a baccalaureate degree granting institution; and 41.5% have high school equivalent experience.

As the above data indicate, there is an extremely wide disparity in English skill levels of the ESL population. At one extreme, ESL students matriculate with no previous formal study of English and have little or no formal schooling either in their native land or in the United States. On the other hand, ESL students matriculate with several years of English study, completed baccalaureate studies in their native land, or, in the case of younger students, have received diplomas from American high schools and/or attended other colleges in this country.

These vast differences speak to the need for a complex and variegated ESL curriculum able to provide English language instruction at several skill levels. Moreover, many ESL students may need several semesters of studies in adult school or community colleges before they can adequately prepare to pursue their educational goals. This situation requires a highly sensitive set of English language assessment and diagnostic tools and a knowledgeable counseling staff capable of guiding students to the appropriate coursework.

The changing demographics of San Mateo County indicate both an aging population and a population that is becoming increasingly diverse among the younger age groups. The number of CSM students who are not native speakers of English and who need ESL classes will probably continue to increase over the next several years. The information from this study should be helpful as the College plans to accommodate these increases and enhance the learning environment and support systems appropriate for this important group of students.

For further information, please contact the Office of Articulation and Research.
Telephone: (650) 574-6196
Fax: (650) 574-6680
Internet: sewart@smccd.cc.ca.us