



# **Basic Skills as a Foundation for Student Success in California Community Colleges**

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**The Center for Student Success**



The Research and Planning Group  
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- **Fresno City College** adds a guidance/counseling class to its math, English, and ESL paired classes to create three-class learning communities. A typical clustering is basic skills reading, basic skills writing, and counseling. Instruction is supplemented by trips to museums, historical landmarks, and events relevant to the subject matter of the class's work.
- **Solano Community College**, building on the success of its learning communities that include English, math, and counseling classes, plans to institute two new learning communities: one consisting of 8.5 units and the other 10.5 units. "Cultures and Computers," for lower-level students, will include a basic skills reading and writing class (two levels below transfer-level English composition), a study skills class, a one-unit guidance/counseling class, and a one-half-unit fast-track introduction to computers class. The reading and writing class requires an hour of reading lab and an hour of writing lab work.
- **The Watsonville Digital Bridge Academy at Cabrillo College** is aimed at young, underprepared students who are traditionally at high risk for college attrition. It offers a sequenced program of academic and career-oriented courses with extended support services and a focus on increasing learner motivation, self-knowledge, and self-discipline. Students begin as a cohort with a two- to three-week motivational foundation program in which they gain awareness of their own learning and interaction styles as well as those of their classmates. They practice teamwork and group problem-solving skills, and develop close ties with program peers and faculty. Following this initial period, the students enter an accelerated bridge semester, culminating with presentations of in-depth study projects in which the students define a problem, collect and analyze data, draw conclusions, and present their recommendations. Students complete six classes in their first semester in the program.

A comparison of the success rates for these two groups revealed a significantly higher rate for those who visited the Writing Center.

Participants in early pilots of the program were largely Latino, with more than 80 percent non-native English speakers, 80 percent children of migrant parents, about 90 percent low-income, and 63 percent first-generation college students. Up to 65 percent had "high risk" factors including failure to complete high school, pregnancy, or responsibilities for parenthood while enrolled. In its initial offering, all students completed the foundation program and 83 percent of the original cohort successfully completed the 19.5-unit bridge semester. A subsequent semester yielded a 79 percent completion rate. As of January 2006, the program had served a total of 125 students, and was being examined for replication at other Bay Area colleges.

### 3. Integrated Reading and Writing Programs

- **Grossmont College's Writing Center (WC)** is a multi-modal center offering individualized college writing instruction by a certificated instructor, peer tutoring for reading with reading and/or writing assignments, and computer-assisted learning. Under the purview of the English Department and Learning Skills Coordinator, the Lab Specialist oversees tutors and work-study aides and assists the English Writing Centers' instructors. Tutoring services cost \$111,000 per year.

An examination of students enrolled in pre-collegiate English courses from Fall 1999 through Spring 2002 (excluding summers and ESL courses) compared students who visited the WC with students who did not visit the WC. A comparison of the enrollment success rates for these two groups revealed a significantly higher success rate for those students who visited the WC in comparison with the success rate of those not visiting the WC (66.1 percent vs. 53.1 percent, respectively).