

# 2007 to 2008 Academic Year Update on Mt. San Antonio College's Basic Skills Initiative Funded Projects

## **Background:**

Over \$33 million of the higher education budget has been allocated for the improvement of basic skills at the state's 109 community colleges. Mt. SAC has received \$1.3 million in funding for the 2006-2007 academic year and \$1.1 million for the 2007-2008 academic year for basic skills projects. The Basic Skills Initiative (BSI) offers the funding and thus support for California community colleges such as Mt. SAC to research, develop, implement, and cultivate effective educational practices that will improve learning outcomes for students who are under-prepared for college-level work. Through the direction of the Basic Skills Committee this funding is responsible for over 50 projects at Mt. SAC.

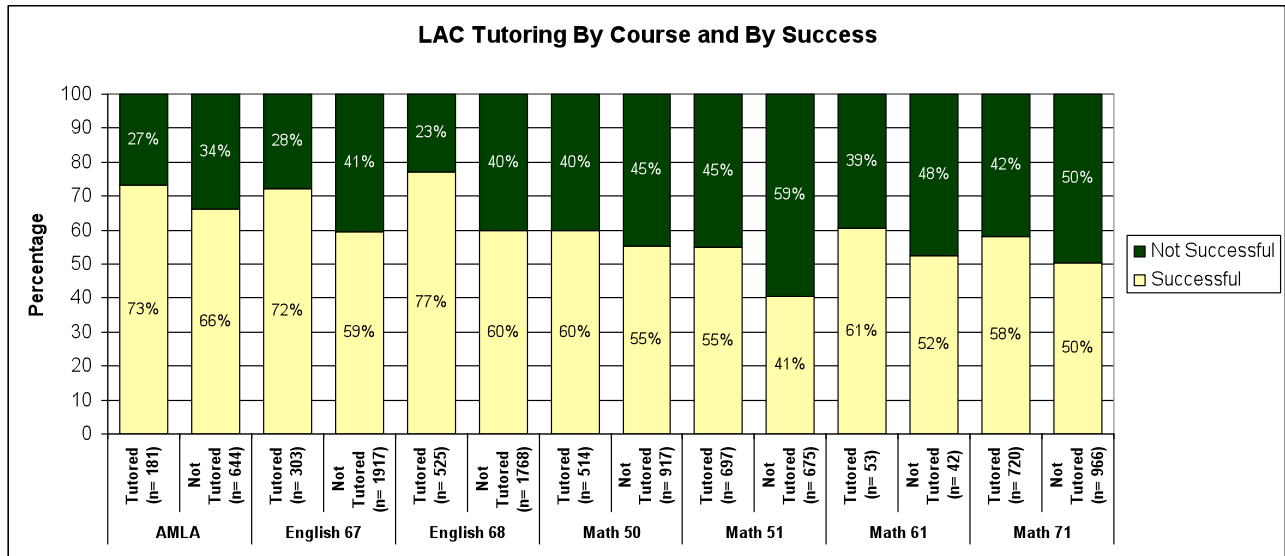
Each of these projects was built upon the question, "Is it good for students?" As such, each project was designed to align with at least one effective practice outlined in the *Basic Skills as a Foundation for Student Success in California Community Colleges* publication. This publication also known as the "Poppy Copy" provides a framework for student success in basic skills education. Using a review of current literature, it identifies four main areas of effective practices relevant to a successful developmental education program.

## Organizational and Administrative Practices Implemented at Mt. SAC

One effective practice outlined under Organizational and Administrative Practices is that, "A comprehensive system of support services exists, and is characterized by a high degree of integration among academic and student support systems" (Boroch et al., 2007). Several Basic Skills Initiative (BSI) funded projects at Mt SAC were aligned with this effective practice. For instance, the Learning Assistance Center (LAC) received funds which allowed them to extend their services to weekend and evening students as well as conduct preliminary assessments of their services. Five research studies were conducted for the Learning Assistance Center by the Basic Skills Research Team. Students who utilized LAC services during the spring 2008 term were asked to complete surveys regarding their use of various LAC services. The four areas surveyed were the Testing Center, Tutorial Services, the Skills Lab, and the Learning Lab. Over 96% of the respondents at the Skills Lab reported finding their

lab assignments as being "useful" to "very useful". At the Testing Center 98% of those surveyed reported being "satisfied" to "very satisfied" with the services they received. There were also favorable outcomes from respondents at the Learning Lab. Here 97% of the students rated their experiences at the Learning Lab as "useful" to "very useful". At Tutorial Services, 91% of those surveyed "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that the tutoring they received helped them to be successful in their classes. A fifth and final study for the LAC provided evidence that comprehensive support services such as those offered by the LAC are well received among Mt. SAC students. This study examined success rates of those tutored at LAC's Tutorial Services. The results of the study suggest that the overall success rates of students who received tutoring in basic skills courses were higher than those who did not. Figure 1 is a graphic representation of those results.

(Figure 1)



The LAC was not the only BSI project which involved tutoring. In fact, there were at least six other projects that focused on or included a tutoring component. Nearly all of these projects conducted some form of evaluation of these support-based services. The results of these studies suggest that tutoring was

beneficial. Overall, the BSI projects which aligned with the "Poppy Copy's", Organizational and Administrative Practices were well received by students and corresponded with improved student learning outcomes.

### Program Components

The "Poppy Copy" also maintains that regular program evaluations, in which the results and data are disbursed widely, are important elements of student success in developmental education. This was realized at Mt. SAC through BSI funding of research studies to determine the contributing factors to student success in pre-collegiate courses. The Mathematics Department is just one area that conducted these types of studies.

A total of 6 program-related analyses for the Mathematics department were completed. One innovative and collaborative study examined student success in sequential math courses by instructors. Utilizing the exceptional data warehouse created and maintained by the Information Technology Department (IT), the Basic Skills Research Team assembled student success data by instructor for

math courses identified as pre-collegiate. This data was then used to generate a success rate for each instructor in the next sequential math class. So, for instance, instructor Z teaches Math 50 and 60% of her students are successful. Instructor Z's successful students were then tracked to determine what percentage were successful in Math 51 within the next two academic terms. This data was given to the Mathematics department who generated a personalized graph of the results for each instructor. Additionally, those instructors with high success rates in the second course in the sequence are being interviewed about the practices they utilize in the classroom. Their reported practices will then be compiled and shared in the math department in order to promote effective pedagogy in mathematics.

### Staff Development

The purpose of several BSI-funded projects was to provide staff development opportunities. Perhaps the largest of these was managed by the Professional Organizational Development department (POD). Approximately \$44,000 was invested in Mt. SAC employees as a result. This project provided faculty and staff with travel and conference funds for events focused on Basic Skills issues. A survey of the attendees of these events was conducted. Surprisingly, 76% of those invited to take the survey, completed it. Of those who responded to the survey, nearly 70% reported expecting to learn something new at the conference they attended, while 39% stated they were presenting information at the conference. To be updated, and network with others were also reasons given for attending the conference or event. Nearly all the respondents (92%) stated that their previously reported expectations had been met

in regards to the conference they attended. Finally, 96% reported that attending the conference benefited their role in Basic Skills Education. Such findings illustrate that staff development is a valuable effective practice at the College. Although these events are not the long term professional learning advocated by the BSI within this effective practice it was a beneficial beginning.

To extend the College's capacity for long-term professional development, a new Teaching & Learning Center (TLC) will be designed for implementation in 2008-09. Plans for the TLC are currently in development. The college's teaching and learning center will provide more long term professional development in the future, which more closely aligns with this practice.

### Instructional Practices

The fourth category of effective practices outlined in the *Basic Skills as a Foundation for Student Success in California Community Colleges*, is instructional practices. It states, "Effective instructional practices are the key to achieving desired student outcomes for developmental programs" (Boroch et al., 2007). The Initiative also states that a key instructional practice

includes employing a variety of instructional methods to accommodate student diversity. This year the BSI provided funding for "Pull-Out" instruction to high school diploma students in the Community & Noncredit Education division at Mt. SAC. Pull-Out Instruction provides extra learning assistance to students through directed/one-on-one interactions

between instructor and student. Students needing Pull-Out instruction are typically deficient in course credits and often struggle academically. Pull-Out Group Instruction is similar to individual Pull-Out in the sense that it provides more direct instruction yet is different because it offers directed and paced instruction in a small group (typically 10-15 students). Two research studies were conducted regarding this project. One study was qualitative in design in which students and instructors were asked about their perceptions of the program. Pull-Out students reported that they benefited from a highly interactive method of instruction and is also worth noting that students felt that the personal and emotional

relationship with the instructor which consisted of trust, care, and comfort were important aspects of the learning environment. Students reported that the Pull-Out instructors kept the students on track, moving forward, and in progression toward completing their degree/coursework requirements. A few students anecdotally referred to other high school classes as being "overcrowded" and one student mentioned that "you had to want help" to get attention from an instructor. Such comments suggest that non-traditional instruction is beneficial for students who are unsuccessful in traditional high school settings and highlights the importance of innovative instructional practices for developmental learners.

### Conclusion

Clearly this update only scratches the surface of the Basic Skills efforts undertaken this year at Mt San Antonio College. Additional projects, as well as research findings can be found in a more detailed Final Report of Mt. San Antonio College's Basic Skills Initiative Funded Projects 2007 to 2008. This compilation documents Mt. SAC's 2007 to 2008 activities, research findings, and future recommendations for the Basic Skills Initiative projects. It illustrates the utility of several newly added projects at the College which have arisen solely from this funding. In addition, the final report provides history, evidence, and thorough documentation of the research that have taken place at the College during the 2007/2008 academic year regarding these Basic Skills projects. Much was learned this year and much remains to be investigated. This year has been a solid building block for future efforts.

*References:*

Center for Student Success. Basic Skills as a Foundation for Success in California Community Colleges. Sacramento, CA: California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2007.