

Title: Promoting college and university readiness: Support for collaboration by high school, college and university faculty in Writing, Mathematics and other General Education areas.

Governor's Policy Initiative: Student Centered Alignment: Develop an aligned education enterprise

Description:

Successful transitions from high school to college, and from 2-year college to 4-year institution, require mastery of fundamental skills in reading, writing and mathematics, as well as effective introduction to subjects such as social science, humanities, and natural science. Equally important, high school graduates need to have practiced the analytical thinking that will characterize their work toward associate or baccalaureate degrees. All of this is evident, but not easy to achieve. Academic cultural distinctions, combined with the insulating effect of separate administrative structures, mean that instructors in different educational sectors often operate without knowing, except in broad outline, the content of courses that precede or follow their own. Likewise, there is no systematic way to verify the similarity of courses whose outcomes are intended to be the same. As a result, serious instructional gaps can develop – gaps that interrupt students' intellectual development and promote a sense of futility and defeat. This proposal will create a mechanism for detecting and eliminating these destructive gaps through regular and direct communication among faculty teaching at two critical interfaces: high school to college/university and 2-year college to 4-year college/university.

This proposal will bring high school, community college, and university faculty together to examine what they teach, particularly in fundamental subjects such as Mathematics and Writing, and how they determine what students have mastered. The specific projects described below are intended to establish a new collaborative structure that will persist and expand to other subjects. The projects are deliberately limited in scope so as to make them practical as a starting point, but we expect them to catalyze systemic change.

We propose to bring high school, community college and university faculty together to

- 1. align the content and level of Mathematics and Writing courses that are at the high school/college interface;**
- 2. test a new outcomes framework to determine the equivalence and transferability of General Education courses at the college/university interface.**

Project 1. builds on the earlier success of statewide groups in Writing (OWEAC), Mathematics (OMEC), and Computer Science, and will complement Oregon's Pre-engineering and Applied Sciences (OPAS) education effort. The project has 3 specific goals:

- One goal is to insure that college-level courses that are taught in all three sectors (introductory Writing and beginning Calculus, for example) introduce all students to the same concepts, and do so at the same level of detail and sophistication.

- The second goal is to examine the courses that immediately precede college-level work (courses typically taken by high school juniors and seniors) to verify that their content will position students to succeed in the coursework that follows. The focus on Mathematics will support the review and revision of K-12 Mathematics Grade-Level Standards that began in November 2005 and will be finalized in April, 2007. It may also be useful for the joint faculty groups to consider the use of placement tests across the state. At present, multiple Math placement tests are in use, and some variation is essential for reliable placement in the specialized programs offered by diverse institutions. In addition, however, a common understanding of the most widely-used tests would be helpful to students in high school and beyond. If the Math placement tests used by colleges and universities were available in high schools, teachers would be able to communicate college-level expectations to all of their students. Further, the Oregon Department of Education might want to investigate the utility of well-calibrated placement tests as measures of student mastery of the tentatively planned 11th/12th grade standards.
- The third goal, which is related to the second goal, is to create a mechanism for fostering long-term collaboration among teachers in all three sectors on the formulation and refinement of high school “Course Statements” – that is, descriptions of what courses of particular kinds should include. Joint work will insure that the statements describe knowledge and skills that are truly college-preparatory, and that the statements are also realistic and specific enough to be useful to high school teachers. In the case of Mathematics, these concepts and skills will be cross-walked to the K-12 Mathematics Grade-Level Standards in order to foster communication with a broad population of high school teachers. The collaboration required to achieve this goal could evolve to include periodic review of college-level courses taught in high school, along with their college/university counterparts, by 3-sector faculty groups similar to those described below for Project 2.

Project 2. takes advantage of the momentum generated by current statewide attention to General Education. Senate Bill 342, passed in 2005, called for better articulation and alignment of the educational enterprise, and as one approach, asked for an outcomes-based framework for General Education. The drafting of this framework, and its consideration by the full faculty at each community college and public university, will likely be completed in the current biennium (2005-07). Its successful application, however, will require regular and continuing communication among faculty in each of the General Education disciplines. At present, there are six such disciplines, corresponding to the broad subject areas within the AA/OT. Revision of this transferable degree could add areas in the future.

This proposal is to support meetings of community college and university faculty as they begin to base course transferability decisions on the new General Education Outcomes Statements and Course Criteria. In the short term, we anticipate that this new decision-making process will inspire confidence that course equivalencies on paper correspond to equivalent educational experiences for students. In the longer term, we expect that these collegial interactions among faculty will generate new ideas for courses and curricula, and will lead to improvements in General Education throughout the state. The work of these groups could also provide a model for examining high school courses that are equivalent to college courses or serve as pre-requisites for them.

Outcomes expected from the four projects in this Policy Package:

1. High school courses will be more effective in preparing students for college work in Writing and Mathematics because the courses will be designed and delivered with an understanding of the content of the college courses that follow them. Moreover, students who take college-level courses in various subjects while still in high school will be confident that their experiences are truly collegiate ones.
2. The efficiency of students' use of college/university credits will increase as a result of better articulation of their General Education coursework.
3. Requirements, Rewards, and Recognition: We anticipate that the joint work initiated with these projects will lead to clear pathways for demonstrating proficiency in college-preparatory subjects. Multiple options will be available and these will be calibrated with one another so that the results by any method will be comparable. Cross-sector collaboration will help set realistic requirements and appropriate rewards and recognition for student achievement.

Performance Indicators:

- Understanding in all three sectors of the kinds of Writing and Mathematics courses that allow students to progress.
- More informative descriptions of college-preparatory courses in all subjects.
- Objective analysis of the effect of removing curricular gaps. As soon as it becomes available, we plan to use the Oregon P-20 Information System (described in OUS Policy Option Package # __) to track students' academic history. We anticipate that this system, which will link student records in all 3 sectors, will be available for Fall 2009. It will allow us to correlate particular patterns of high school coursework with placement test levels and with subsequent academic performance in community college and university.
- Reduction in the time and number of credits students use to complete the General Education part of their degree work. We will be particularly interested in these data for transfer students, since improved articulation based on the Outcomes/criteria framework, should eliminate unnecessary repetition of General Education courses.

Budget

Under development