

# Los Angeles Community College District

## Framework for Student Success

October 10, 2007

This document outlines a strategic framework for improving preparatory instruction and student achievement in the Los Angeles Community College District. The recommendations contained here emerged during District-wide discussion of the spring 2007 Basic Skills Self Assessment pilot project and workshops and committee meetings related to the District's on-going Student Success Initiative that have occurred over the past two years. The key principles underlying the "Framework for Student Success" are these:

1. "Basic Skills" are Essential Academic Skills: Teaching the fundamental academic skills is not a process that ends when students enter college or after completion of a preparatory course sequence. The continued development of essential literacy, numeracy, and information technology skills lies at the heart of the collegiate mission.
2. Institutional Integration: Essential academic, career, and life skills must be taught and reinforced across the campus in every class by every faculty member and through every student support service.
3. Structured Pathways: Most first-time college students need a menu of structured options that will help them see the pathway to their goals.
4. Contextualization: Students learn essential skills best in practical, experiential contexts that link the development of essential skills to real-world problems and themes associated with students' present communities and future careers.
5. Self-Direction: To become effective learners, students must take responsibility for setting, monitoring, and achieving their own educational goals.
6. Urgency: Students need to move through basic skills preparatory course sequences as rapidly as possible if they are to persist and succeed.
7. Inter-Segmental K-16 Collaboration: We need to begin preparing students long before they apply for admission by working collaboratively with K-16 partners to align standards and expectations and to chart clear career pathways.

The 17 proposed actions included here are offered solely as a conceptual framework. They are meant to *guide* and *not to direct* District-wide action, and are certainly not intended to impose a single, locked-step approach to educational reform on LACCD colleges. They are presented with full understanding that the nine LACCD colleges must develop their own plans of action that are consistent with their individual missions and appropriate to their institutional cultures and the communities they serve.

## Matriculation

During their first contact with the college, students must get the information they will need to succeed—information about their readiness for college, about career and academic options, and about the services that are available to help them. They must also establish clear personal and academic goals and develop a detailed, step-by-step plan for achievement them.

1. **Assess all Entering Students** Every entering first-time student should be assessed in math and English and should be actively encouraged to take classes in response to these assessments. Students should also be allowed to re-assess periodically to permit accelerated movement through English and math sequences.
  
2. **Provide Orientation for All** All entering first-time students should participate in a comprehensive orientation process that gives them a complete introduction to college resources, financial aid, and educational goal setting, etc.
  
3. **Strengthen the Individual Ed Plan Process** The colleges should require all first-time students to meet with a counselor individually or in small groups to identify a realistic educational goal, to “map” the specific courses needed to attain it, and to sketch a timeline—with specific milestones—for its completion. This personal educational map should be revisited at least once a year with an academic advisor.
  
4. **Institute an Introduction to College Course “Requirement”** All first-time degree, transfer, and certificate seeking students should be required (or strongly encouraged) to complete an “Introduction to College” course during their first semester of study. This course should be designed to do the following:
  - A. Acquaint students with the byways and expectations of college culture;
  - B. Help them assess and hone essential personal, study, and time management skills;
  - C. Encourage them to become active “self-regulating” learners who set goals and monitor their own academic progress;
  - D. Familiarize them with campus resources (including the library, bookstore, financial aid, tutorial centers, computer labs, etc.); and
  - E. Provide them with basic information about career pathways and degree requirements
  
5. **Deploy Web Portal to Engage & Inform Students** The District should develop a student portal system that will integrate student email, chat, academic calendars and planners, college information and resources, student support services, degree audit, extracurricular club sites, the ASO, and other important sources of information. The purpose of this portal will be to provide students will important college information, to engage them more directly with college life, and to connect them interactively with college faculty, their classmates, and their peers outside of class.

## Instruction

To help students succeed we need to move them through preparatory course sequences and into the regular curriculum as quickly as possible. We also need to reinforce key academic competencies in every class and to contextualize basic skills development and, indeed, all instruction by linking it to relevant, real-world social and career-related problems and issues.

**6. Require Basic Skills Coursework Up Front** The colleges should strongly encourage or, if possible, require students to complete preparatory work during the first semester of attendance, before moving into the regular curriculum.

**7. Enforce Pre/Co-requisites** The colleges should initiate and enforce appropriate English and mathematics pre- and co-requisites for enrollment in all basic skills course sequences and transferable General Education courses, unless students are co-enrolled in basic skills courses specifically designed to support the course in question.

**8. Spread Essential Skills Across the Curriculum** All general education and vocational courses should include specific activities designed to reinforce key reading, writing, speaking and computational competencies. Minimum levels of these activities should be specified in the Course Outline of Record for new courses and in the Title V Update form for existing courses. Evidence of the implementation of this requirement should be submitted within the parameters of the program review and Educational Master Planning processes.

**9. Offer “Fast Start” or “Bridge-to-College” Courses** Students should be offered the chance to take intensive short courses to strengthen basic skills and provide an orientation to college prior to the beginning of their first term.

**10. Direct All First-Time Students into “First-Year Academies”** Encourage all entering degree-seeking and transfer students to enroll in a college first-year academy program structured around a central career/professional theme (e.g., medicine & health care, business & financial services, teaching, public service, science & technology, etc.). Such first-year academies should involve the following features:

- A. Cohort groups that build engagement and continuity
- B. Coordinated or theme-based curriculum linking 2 or more classes
- C. Basic skills instruction taught in context of cohort themes
- D. Mutually reinforcing assignments
- E. Integrated tutoring
- F. Integrated activities (field trips, etc.)

**11. Offer Alternative, Accelerated Pathways to Basic Skills Competency** The colleges should offer students the opportunity to complete basic skills preparation through one or more accelerated alternative pathways to traditional course work. These pathways might, for example, take the form of a series of intensive short-term courses or open skills building tutorials or labs. Periodic reassessment will allow students to move ahead in basic skills sequences when ready.

**12. Use e-Portfolios to Reinforce Learning and Technological Literacy** The colleges should implement the use of E-portfolios as a means of documenting student learning, as a tool

for increasing opportunities for student self-reflection and self-development, and as a vehicle for teaching essential information technology and communication skills to all students.

## **Institutional Integration**

Isolating basic skills instruction in special programs might have been a good idea in the '70s and '80s, but today it no longer makes sense to limit success efforts to special programs or narrowly-focused interventions. When more than 85% of all incoming students are under-prepared for college, we need to look to institution-wide efforts if we're going to have a real impact on student preparation.

**13. Focus Professional Development on Student Success** To help faculty integrate practices into their courses designed to enhance the development of essential academic skills, the colleges should focus professional development efforts on topics related to improving basic skills development and student success outcomes. In addition, college professional development coordinators should meet at least twice a semester to discuss and coordinate their activities.

**14. Establish Dedicated Teaching/Learning Centers** The colleges should create "Teaching/Learning Centers" that are designed, staffed, and equipped to do the following:

- A. Provide fulltime and hourly instructors with support as they integrate activities related to basic skills instruction into their courses,
- B. Support professional development activities related to improving basic skills instruction and general student success outcomes, and
- C. Offer students support in the development of essential academic skills competencies.

These Teaching/Learning Centers should be staffed by fulltime faculty with demonstrated expertise in basic skills instruction. They should also be supported by paid tutors and fulltime and part-time faculty who devote some fraction of their teaching load to Teaching/Learning Center duty.

**15. Create a District-wide Student Success Network** Create a district-wide "Student Success Network" modeled on the STARS program in order to raise consciousness about the student success effort, involve more faculty and staff directly in the initiatives and activities related to student success, and spread more SSI best practices across the district. Within the first year, this network should:

- Recruit and enroll 1,000-1,500 LACCD faculty and staff
- Establish a Student Success website to serve as a forum for the exchange of information and best practices
- Design and implement District-wide workshops and events dedicated to improving basic skills and student success outcomes.

## K-16 Partnerships

By the time students arrive at our colleges it is often too late to help them prepare effectively for college success. To address the crisis of student under-preparation that we are currently facing, we will need to reach out to our colleagues in the K-12 system and in surrounding 4-year institutions to create a “seamless” educational “pipeline” that helps students understand and ready themselves to meet college-level expectations before they apply for college admission.

**16. Align Standards and Expectations** The colleges should collaborate actively with neighboring high schools and 4-year institutions to articulate courses, establish well-defined career pathways, and define and align standards and expectations. District discipline committees should aid this effort by aligning student learning outcomes as closely as possible for critical course sequences. They should also report on their progress in this effort on a regular basis to the District Academic Senate.

**17. Assess, Orient, and Prepare before HS Graduation** The colleges should make student preparation a central aspect of their outreach and enrollment management efforts. In the future, all students at area high schools should be assessed and offered the opportunity via concurrent enrollment to improve their basic skills before graduation.