

Los Medanos College
Strengthening Pre-Collegiate Education in Community Colleges (SPECC)
April 2008 Report
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Executive Summary:

As part of the SPECC grant, Los Medanos College has moved closer to its goal of becoming a prepared institution. We have known for many years that the majority of students who enter our college, like other community colleges in our state and nation, are not yet prepared to succeed in general and occupational course work designed to culminate in a degree or certificate. It took us a bit longer to come to the conclusion that it was not enough to offer courses and services designed to “remediate” the skills deficiencies of our students. We now understand that the institution itself must be prepared to welcome our students and work with them as partners in clarifying and achieving their academic and career goals. This requires a coordinated program that takes an integrated approach to curriculum, support services and professional development in order to optimize student learning, both in and outside of the classroom.

To that end, we have worked extensively on creating and sustaining a multifaceted program with an emphasis on collaborative inquiry. Believing that questions drive learning, we pose relevant and significant questions and investigate possible answers. One way we do this is through the work of teaching communities – faculty coming together to systematically study student work and listen carefully to what students are telling us, both by what they say, and what they do and produce. Over time, by documenting the work of these teaching communities, and representing it in accessible ways, such as web pages or electronic portfolios that allow others to see and sometimes hear the work of our students, we are able to draw on a body of evidence that allows us to make informed decisions that improve teaching and learning.

In addition, we have created an institutional infrastructure that makes our work possible in a systematic, on-going way. We have full institutional support for faculty leadership in our developmental education program in terms of adequate reassigned time and a reliable budget for compensating faculty participation in teaching communities. We have defined program level student learning outcomes for developmental education and use regular assessments of student work to tell us how our students are doing relative to those outcomes. These assessments inform the work of our teaching communities. We also collaborate with the Office of Institutional Research on a research agenda that is designed to measure student achievement and engagement. We have a committee that meets monthly to coordinate our decentralized program and to conduct regular program evaluations of our program goals. In evaluating our progress toward our goals, we are learning to collect data and disaggregate it in ways that allow us to consider differential effects on particular populations of students.

For detailed information about our programmatic approach, please contact Nancy Ybarra, or after July 1, 2008 look on our website at www.losmedanos.edu, search the A-Z index for Developmental Education Program.

Reflection: What we have done, what we have learned, and how we plan to build on it.

January 2005 – June 2008

As the coordinators for the developmental education program at Los Medanos College, we saw the SPECC grant as an opportunity to:

- capture and document the programmatic approach we established as a result of our Title III grant from 1999 -2004 (Goal 1 of our SPECC grant)
- extend and deepen the work we had begun on using teaching communities as a primary means of professional development that would result in improved student learning (Goal 2 of our SPECC grant)

With regard to Goal 1:

During our Title III years, we worked hard to define a “program” and to differentiate it from a sequence of courses and an array of support services. That distinction rests on a few key components of a program:

- Articulated, published and shared mission, philosophy, and goals
- On-going leadership, collaboration, and coordination
- Defined student learning outcomes and systematic assessment
- Curriculum based professional development
- Integrated instruction and student support services
- Systematic program evaluation

As difficult as it is to put such a program in place, it is even more difficult to sustain and build on it in a cohesive way. We therefore proposed with our SPECC funds, to create a website that would represent our work and create a place where we could share it with our own colleagues, orient new faculty to our program, and provide a resource to other community colleges interested in taking an integrated programmatic approach to developmental education. The website represents both the overall components of a program as listed above, and the incredible detail and scope of the work done in addressing all of those components simultaneously. It reflects the challenge of documenting multifaceted work: the need for a clear sense of purpose and a synthesis of disparate initiatives which will effectively inform, engage and motivate faculty, administrators, and possibly program developers at other colleges. (We have completed about 75% of the website. You can access it at <http://www.losmedanos.edu/deved/default.asp>; it will be linked to the LMC website in July, 2008.)

With regard to Goal 2:

Throughout the SPECC years, we continued our work with teaching communities in both English and math, focusing on different courses in our developmental sequences as well as different formats for the teaching communities themselves. Our teaching communities continue to integrate research and effective practice into classroom-based inquiry that is grounded in analysis of student work. The English department investigated questions of pedagogy and curriculum in the teaching of reading, grammar and correction of error with ESL students. The math department applied math ed. research on how students learn arithmetic and algebra to develop and class-test curriculum and analyze pedagogy. There is preliminary evidence that professional development actually impacted student learning in elementary algebra, an elusive connection that is hard to substantiate, but which confirms the findings of Mary Kennedy’s summative study of K-12 teacher in-service from which math faculty took their initial inspiration.

In the Fall of 2006 we tried something completely different, bringing English and math faculty together for a semester long seminar in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. We began with a pre-semester two day training with Carnegie scholar Randy Bass, who helped our faculty pose an individual research question and consider ways to investigate it in their classrooms. This was a departure from our more collaborative model of jointly investigating a common research question. While faculty certainly learned from their engagement in those projects, it did not lead to the kind of programmatic improvement that had, for example, been the result of previous math teaching communities that led to new and innovative curriculum and pedagogy. It did, however, give faculty an opportunity to look deeply at student work and reflect on it in important ways. The web pages that faculty created as a result of their SoTL projects reflect a careful study of who our students are, and how they think about the tasks we ask them to do in our classrooms. Even the research questions posed demonstrate an acute interest in how to connect with students' perspectives on academic work and on bridging the academic and the affective. For example, two math instructors specifically looked at how students' confidence and feelings about math affected their learning, and two English instructors searched for ways to bring student voice and culture more directly into their writing and sense of belonging in the college community.

Lessons Learned:

The most important lesson we have learned is that teachers are learners too, and all the same principles of learning apply. When faculty learning is taken seriously, we must plan for it as carefully as one plans for student learning in the classroom. As learners, faculty need an environment in which they feel safe, motivated, engaged and challenged. They need structure, guidance and room to be creative. The faculty coordinator who is running the teaching community is more than a facilitator; he or she is crafting an intentional experience with a specific purpose and defined outcomes. In addition, there must be a mechanism for faculty to synthesize what they have learned in some final "product" for which they take ownership. And, there must be a way to provide faculty with relevant and respectful feedback on their work. All this, of course, takes time, a valuable commodity in any workplace, and a specific challenge in higher education due to the high percentage of adjunct faculty who teach the majority of our classes. There must be not only adequate compensation, but also careful advance planning to create the circumstances in which teaching communities can flourish.

Another lesson learned is that while we ground our teaching communities in a careful analysis of student work, it is equally important to consider the student behind that work. The exam, the paper, the project are artifacts that reflect a student's learning at a particular point in time. From studying those artifacts, we make inferences about the learner and about the impact of the learning experiences we have created for her. Our goal is not to produce more perfect artifacts, but to touch something *within the learner herself* – something that will enable her to connect, act and reflect in more thoughtful ways. To learn something deeply means to change how one sees the world and one's place in it. Above all, we want our students to begin to see themselves as learners: as readers, writers, thinkers, problem solvers. So questions of motivation, engagement and identity provide the context for our inquiry into learning, and we must consider them not just for our students, but for ourselves, as teachers, as well. Who are we in the classroom? What is engaging and motivating us? When are we fearful or excited? What are we learning about ourselves and our ways of teaching? What impact does our learning have on our students? These are all legitimate and necessary topics to engage in our teaching communities along with analysis of student work and close examination of curriculum and pedagogy. We do engage these questions when we invite students to "think aloud" as they solve a math problem, or read challenging text, or write for authentic purposes and audiences. And we engage them when we ask faculty to model who they are as readers, or write a reflection about how they create community in their classrooms, or how they plan for engaging students affectively as well as cognitively.

The third lesson we have learned is the importance of documenting our work. Whether we are writing a grant report, building a KEEP snapshot of a SoTL project, or constructing a website for our program, documentation has become a mechanism that forces us to reflect, to synthesize, to

clarify our purpose, to learn. Documentation forms the basis of creating, sustaining, and recreating the vision of what we want developmental education to be. It is an integral part of our current mantra “do it, document it, share it and build on it.”

Sustainability:

How do we sustain and build upon what we have learned? As Lee Shulman notes, “the problem is not that we don’t have excellent teachers. The problem is that teaching as a profession – and education in general- has no systematic way of improving itself.” What does it look like when a program begins to build on the lessons learned through inquiry?

We now know that work done in teaching communities needs to be shared in more effective ways within our own departments of English and math, and within our institutions. We have had some success with taking small steps in using what we have learned in teaching communities to build our practice at LMC. In English, the work done on reading apprenticeship and grammar informed our tutor training in developmental English. We realized that after one year of studying effective pedagogy for teaching grammar, we still didn’t have any clear sense of how to do it in a coherent way. So why were we having our peer tutors attempting to work with students on grammar? Instead, we changed our tutor training to focus on reading apprenticeship strategies, an approach we felt we understood and could effectively use as teachers. Peer tutors are able to successfully help students “talk out loud” about what they are reading, formulate thoughtful questions, and express personal responses. Departmental work on learning outcomes, assessment and the revision of course outlines led to a teaching community called “Building a Course”, a conversation on what real courses looked like based on the revised course outlines. Those conversations were then represented in faculty created course portfolios. We also used those portfolios to address issues that had surfaced in previous teaching communities about the importance of building community in the classroom, and intentionally built that into the course portfolio template to be sure work in that area was documented and shared.

In math, the work of the teaching communities has also influenced departmental directions in course design. For example, early in our SPECC work a prealgebra teaching community studied the impact of computer-aided instruction on procedural skill attainment, building a body of evidence that encouraged widespread use of software in the arithmetic and algebra courses. This project helped convince instructors that they could devote more instructional time to intentional work on non-algorithmic problem-solving without adversely impacting students’ procedural skill performance. Preliminary work by a teaching community that focused on a research-based framework for assessing the cognitive demand of math tasks has influenced the development of packets of conceptually rich and coherent class activities that are now widely used in the algebra sequence. Another teaching community used case studies to analyze the impact of pedagogy on student learning. This work led to our current focus on Lesson Study as a mechanism to investigate, document, and build on pedagogical strategies that enhance student engagement and improve students’ achievement of our program’s core learning outcomes. Recent assessments of student work suggest that students are tackling non-algorithmic problems with more success.

On an institutional level, work in developmental education has influenced assessment and professional development throughout the college. Teaching communities are now being implemented in general education, following similar principles of learning from the assessment of student work. Across the curriculum, plans are now underway, as part of our Basic Skills Initiative, to use our Reading and Writing Center as a nexus for across the curriculum partnerships in Reading Apprenticeship. We plan to document that work in course portfolios that will model how content courses can be revised to address the centrality of reading comprehension to student learning in the disciplines.

There is no question that Los Medanos College will continue its work in developmental education. Even without grant funds, the college provides release time for DE leadership in math and English, as well as coordination of our decentralized model. In addition, we have on-going funding to support professional development in the DE Program, which is primarily used to pay adjuncts for participating in teaching communities. Even with this financial support, we still struggle to build on our work to create a learning college that takes collaborative responsibility for providing engaging and supportive environment for underprepared students.

Finally, the Basic Skills Initiative has provided an opportunity for a renewed college-wide focus on developmental education. We have spent the last year facilitating college-wide workshops on effective practices in developmental education, raising both awareness and buy-in for the many efforts that have been on-going and some new ones as well. BSI funding will allow us to deepen our commitment to being a prepared institution. One of the central messages we heard from our colleagues is the importance of a programmatic approach – a message that certainly resonates with us. The faculty and staff of Los Medanos College understand the need to weave diverse approaches to helping our students into a common fabric of institutional support. We want to encourage innovation and experimentation, but avoid fragmentation, marginalization and isolation. Toward that end, we intend to launch a Learning Center that will promote the integration of instruction and support services, a primary goal of the DE program. We plan to build on both the Reading Apprenticeship work started during our SPECC years, and the Lesson Study. We are also bringing in new leadership for the DE committee and the college is supporting that transition by providing reassigned time for the outgoing coordinator to train and support the incoming leaders – a rare commitment to professional development, but aligned with the college's on-going financial commitment to funding DE leadership and professional development within teaching communities. In sum, improving basic skills education is not a superficial or temporary focus for Los Medanos College. For the last 15 years it has been an intensive effort that has received full financial support and concerted educational leadership. With the help of the SPECC grant, the Carnegie Foundation and our SPECC colleagues, we have done much work in support of our students, and we have begun to document and share that work. With our BSI plans, we intend to build on it as a college.

From our SPECC grant proposal:

GOAL 1: Create a multi-media website for the purpose of orienting new faculty to the LMC Developmental Education program and providing information for other colleges designing Developmental Education programs.

GOAL 2: Expand and enhance the professional development and assessment efforts provided by Teaching Communities. Produce a staff development “curriculum” handbook and course-level assessment “guide”.

		Doing (Activities connected to grant goals)	Documenting and Sharing (Products and Events)
SP05	Goal 1	Developed a map for the DE Program website	Set up Blackboard classrooms for faculty to share materials and as a temporary holding site for potential website content
	Goal 2	End-of-course assessment across sections of capstone DE English and math courses	Assessment reports submitted to English Department, Math DE Committee, campus-wide DE Committee
FA05	Goal 2	English/ESL Teaching Community on effective methods for correcting errors of ESL students.	Lesson plans and faculty reflections shared on English Dept.’s Blackboard classroom for instructors
		Prealgebra Teaching Community focused on incorporating computer-aided instruction (CAI) and assessing its impact on procedural skill attainment (weekly meetings, 4 of 9 prealgebra instructors, all full-time)	Comparison of scores on quizzes for students using CAI and not using CAI. Report to Math DE Committee on effectiveness of CAI in teaching procedural skills to prealgebra students.
		Elementary Algebra retreats: discussion of the implications of TIMSS study and National Research Council’s <i>How Students Learn Math in the Classroom</i> for LMC algebra curriculum (three 3-hour retreats, 11 participants 82% adjuncts)	
		End-of-course assessment across sections of capstone DE English and math courses	Assessment reports shared with faculty via Bb classrooms for instructors; revision of Intermediate Algebra class activity packet to address assessment results
Presentations: City College: integrated reading and writing (Nancy)			
SP 06	Goal 2	English Teaching Community focused on developing lesson plans using the practices of rhetorical grammar. (weekly meetings, 3 part-time, 2 full-time instructors)	Presentation to English Department on the complexities of teaching grammar; revision of tutor training and focus from grammar instruction to Reading Apprenticeship
		Prealgebra Teaching Community responded to findings from an assessment of final exams by reviewing math education research on “conceptual understanding” and applying findings to curriculum and pedagogy (weekly meetings, 4 full-time instructors)	Website http://www.cfkeep.org/html/stitch.php?s=21223071051038&id=58310652392274 videotaped “think alouds” of prealgebra students working on open-ended problems in groups

		Elementary Algebra retreats applied strategies for “using cognitively complex tasks in the classroom” from <i>Implementing Standards-based Mathematics Instruction: A Casebook for Professional Development</i> , Stein et.al. (three 3-hour retreats, 12 faculty, 83% adjunct)	
		End-of-course assessment of Intermediate Algebra exams	Assessment report submitted to Math DE Committee and campus-wide DE Committee; revision of class activity packet to address assessment results
		Retreat on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (15 participants from English and math, 40% adjunct)	Faculty work-plans outlining SoTL projects for the fall
	<p>Presentations/Publications: Laney: Teaching Communities in English and math (Nancy and Myra) City College: Teaching Communities in math (Myra) Chabot: Reading Apprenticeship (Nancy) Windows on Learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prealgebra Classroom Research http://www.cfkeep.org/html/stitch.php?s=21223071051038&id=58310652392274 • Nancy’s Reading Apprenticeship site http://www.cfkeep.org/html/snapshot.php?id=68198986880667 		
FA 06	Goal 2	Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Seminar for DE English and math faculty (two meetings a month for 11 participants, 36% adjunct)	A gallery of KEEP websites documenting individual classroom research projects http://www.cfkeep.org/html/gallery.php?id=10253405673665
		“Curriculum Mondays” in English: once a month English department meetings devoted to curriculum work with goal of building consensus on course SLOS, assignments, and grading criteria	Work done in course-level groups shared with the department during department meetings
		Elementary Algebra retreats focused on teaching and learning of core procedural skills, collaboratively developed quizzes to set a standard for scope and difficulty. (monthly meetings, 3 full-time and 11 part-time faculty)	A set of “mastery” quizzes that are now used by most faculty teaching Elementary Algebra
		End-of-course assessment across sections of Elementary algebra	Assessment report submitted to Math DE Committee
	<p>Presentations: Strengthening Student Success Conference: “Data into Action” (Myra and Nancy) West Ed videotaped Nancy’s precollegiate English class</p>		
SP 07	Goal 2	“Curriculum Mondays” in English: once a month English department meetings devoted to curriculum work with goal of building consensus on course SLOS, assignments, and grading criteria	Work done in course-level groups shared with the department during department meetings

		Retreats for arithmetic instructors to analyze student success data, interviews with Occ. Ed. faculty, state/national occupational certification exams, course outlines, and examples of innovative curriculum with the goal of making recommendations for revising current course offerings in arithmetic	Recommendations to the Math DE Committee for revising course outlines; A sabbatical leave project that will extend this work into a coherent set of class activities and professional development seminars
		Prealgebra Teaching Community read Lamon's <i>Teaching Fractions and Ratios for Understanding</i> , developed and class-tested curriculum based on Lamon's research, used classroom assessment techniques to assess student understanding.	For each chapter, a summary, a set of problems illustrating core ideas, an assessment of student work, a framework for understanding developmental stages of student thinking. A sabbatical leave project that will extend this work into a coherent set of class activities and professional development seminars
		Elementary Algebra retreats on pedagogy that promotes problem-solving skills; participants read case studies from <i>Improving Algebra Instruction: Using Cases to Transform Mathematics Teaching and Learning</i> and conducted a classroom-based project. (four 3-hour retreats, 12 faculty, 75% adjunct)	Instructors presented their projects during the final retreat
	Goal 1	DE Program website development	Skeletal website http://www.losmedanos.edu/deved/default.asp
<p>Presentations/Publications: <i>AMATYC Review</i>: "Using Assessment of Student Learning As A Catalyst For Change" (Myra) BSI literature review (Nancy) CMC^3-South: "AMATYC's <i>Beyond Crossroads</i> and the Assessment of Student Learning" (Myra) Windows on Learning: Pat Wagener's "Can Problem-solving Become a Habit of Mind?" http://www.cfkeep.org/html/stitch.php?s=17890089580687&id=27801206640714</p>			
SU 07	Goal 2	Leadership Institute in Reading Apprenticeship (8 faculty from various disciplines)	Flex activity on Reading Apprenticeship BSI action plans for extending Reading Apprenticeship through mentorship with Reading and Writing Center Director
		Elementary Algebra curriculum development in response to FA 06 assessment results	130-page class activity packet used in FA 07 by 75% of sections taught on main campus
FA 07	Goal 2	Conversations on Building an English Course included discussions about building intentional community in the classroom, grading, designing assignments aligned with SLOs, and reflecting on impact with plans for future improvements (meetings twice a month, 10-12 faculty, half adjuncts)	"My Semester: Warts and All": Four course portfolios on KEEP shared via English Department's Blackboard classroom for instructors

		Building on “Curriculum Mondays” English faculty worked in teams to rewrite course outlines	New course outlines for three English courses
		Elementary Algebra Lesson Study (weekly meetings, 11 instructors, 64% adjunct)	Revised class activity packet and an instructors’ manual
		End-of-course assessment across sections of capstone DE English course and in Elementary algebra	Assessment reports submitted to English Department, Math DE Committee, campus-wide DE Committee, Teaching and Learning Project (campus committee overseeing SLO assessment)
	Goal 1	DE Program website development	Completed program components on website http://www.losmedanos.edu/deved/default.asp
<p>Presentations: Tillery Institute: “The Impact of Professional Development on Programmatic Change” (Nancy and Myra) Strengthening Student Success Conference: “Work It Backwards” (Myra) Laney Mini-conference on Faculty Inquiry: “Math Faculty Inquiry: Assessing Programmatic Outcomes in Developmental Math” (Myra)</p>			
SP 08	Goal 2	Elementary Algebra Lesson Study (weekly meetings; 10 instructors, 70% adjunct)	Revised class activity packet, documented classroom observations; BSI action plan for continued lesson study; Videotaped interviews with students.
	Goal 1	DE Program website development	Working to complete math and English pages on website http://www.losmedanos.edu/deved/default.asp
<p>Presentations/Publications: LMC’s Developmental Education Program website http://www.losmedanos.edu/deved/default.asp Las Positas College: “Responding to Assessment Results: Using Faculty Inquiry to Improve Student Learning” (Myra) Cerritos College: “Closing the Loop: Faculty Learning that Improves Student Learning” (Myra) Santa Barbara College: “Using Faculty Inquiry to Catalyze Change in a Developmental Math Program” (Myra)</p>			