

Basic Skills Initiative (BSI)  
End-of-the-Year Report  
2008-2009

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## Introduction

This end-of-the-year report is intended to inform the college administration, faculty, and student development staff of the work that has been accomplished regarding the implementation of the Basic Skills Initiative at College of the Redwoods. Additionally, the report identifies some of the problems that were encountered and makes recommendations for next year. This in-house report is separate from any reports required by the state and submitted to the System Office.

The long-term goals listed in the BSI Action Plan were originally developed in Spring 2008 as part of the college's self-assessment as required by the state. A group of 30-40 faculty, staff, and administrators met throughout the semester to complete the plan, which was then submitted to the System Office in May 2008. Two of the objectives in that plan called for the appointment of a BSI faculty coordinator and a BSI steering committee. Those appointments were made by the VP Student Learning and Development in consultation with the co-presidents of the Academic Senate. In Fall 2008, the new committee refined the objectives and set target dates for specific actions that could realistically be accomplished during the 08-09 academic year. This report addressed the progress made in implementing the action plan.

The report is comprised of the following sections:

- Status of the 2008-2009 Action Plan
- Commentary on the Action Plan
- Overview of BSI Research at CR
- Recommendations and Concerns

Hard copies of the following BSI data reports as well as additional documents pertaining to BSI and referred to in this report are available in the Academic Senate Office. The data reports are also accessible from the Institutional Research webpage.

### Primary Data Reports:

Baseline Measures for Developmental Education (2006-2008)  
Course Success—All Students by English Level (2005-2008) (e-file only)  
Course Success—All Students by Math Level (2005-2008) (e-file only)  
English and Math Accuplacer Assessment (2006-2008)

### Secondary Data Reports:

Course Success Rates for Basic Skills Classes (2006-2008)  
Course Retention Rates for Basic Skills Classes (2006-2008)  
Course Completion Rates for Basic Skills Classes (2006-2008)  
Course Repetition Rate for Basic Skills Classes (2006-2008)  
Math History and Progress Rates (2006-2008)  
English History and Progress Rates (2006-2008)  
Student Persistence Rate in Basic Skills Classes (2006-2007 & 2007-2008)  
New Student Enrollment and Persistence (2006-2007 & 2007-2008)

### Additional Documents:

“The Basic Skills Initiative: Making Student Success a Priority at College of the Redwoods.” *The Senate Brief*, January 2009.

“Focus on Success: Placement, Enrollment, and Completion Patterns of California Community College Students.” *The Senate Brief*, May 2009.

Excerpt on Basic Skills from the *Educational Master Plan*, May 2009

Mission and goals for Developmental Education at College of the Redwoods

BSI Steering Committee Function and Membership (Draft)

Faculty Development Proposals

**Consultant Report:**

*CR-ESOL Program Handbook: Review, Recommendations, and Incremental Plan*, 2009  
(e-file only)

**System Office Reports:**

Action Plan	October 2008
Action Plan	May 2008
Expenditure Plan	October 2008
Expenditure Plan	May 2008
Expenditure Mid-year Report	January 2009
Expenditure Report	July 2008

### Status of the 2008-2009 Action Plan

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	STATUS
<p>Clarify to the entire institution and community how developmental education is included in institutional planning.</p>	<p>Add Basic Skills Coordinator to the Coordinated Planning Council.</p> <p>Develop and communicate developmental education mission statement, philosophy, and goals.</p> <p>Create and maintain a college internal Basic Skills website.</p>	<p>The BSI Coordinator was added to the membership of the Coordinated Planning Council on 9-12-08.</p> <p>A statement of Mission and Goals for Developmental Education at CR was developed by the BSI steering committee and approved by the Academic Senate on 4-3-09.</p> <p>A minimal BSI website was created in October, 2008.</p>
<p>Implement a process through IR to track retention, success, and progress rates of Basic Skills students in all classes.</p>	<p>Design and pilot a tracking process through IR for one cohort of Basic Skills students.</p> <p>Design and pilot a process through IR for validating cross-disciplinary pre-requisites.</p>	<p>The initial study of baseline measures was expanded to cover three-years of data for F2006-F2008.</p> <p>Success rates for all courses based on the students' current math and English skill levels have been completed for the period F2005-F2008.</p>
<p>Study feasibility of District-wide ESOL program.</p>	<p>Determine greatest needs for ESOL services within District and outline components needed for credit and non-credit programs of appropriate size for the District.</p> <p>Review appropriate placement instruments and practices for placing ESOL students in math and English courses.</p>	<p>A consulting team was hired in Fall 2008 to conduct this study; the full report was completed in April 2009.</p> <p>Recommendations for appropriate placement instruments appear in the Shaw and Huntley report.</p>
<p>Develop a District-wide and multi-disciplinary approach to reviewing Basic Skills curriculum and programs.</p>	<p>Establish a multi-disciplinary Basic Skills committee to oversee the planning, implementation, budgeting, and evaluation of all basic skills programs and activities.</p>	<p>A BSI steering committee was appointed by the VP of Learning and Student Development in consultation with the Academic Senate co-presidents.</p>
<p>Develop counseling, advising, and administrative capacity to oversee comprehensive assessment, placement, and orientation.</p>	<p>Advocate for the hiring of more counseling and advising staff.</p> <p>Develop a plan to increase the proportion of first-time students participating in orientation, assessment, and advising.</p>	<p>The BSI coordinator, in consultation with the steering committee, submitted a request for a counselor to the faculty prioritization process.</p> <p>Student Services has taken over this task.</p>
<p>Incorporate basic skills data and student learning outcomes in all program reviews.</p>	<p>Develop and pilot a process for tracking and reporting program review data on Basic Skills students' retention and success rates in all disciplines and programs.</p>	<p>The success rates of basic skills students in all programs and courses are now available. Prompts requiring analysis of the data have been added to the new comprehensive and annual program review forms to be used in Fall 2009.</p>

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	STATUS
<p>Re-establish a robust professional development center with adequate support and resources and provide ongoing staff development opportunities related to pedagogy, classroom practice, current and new research in the field, and teaching innovations.</p>	<p>Create a reinvigorated professional development center focused on activities that promote effective teaching strategies for development students.</p> <p>Offer a series of workshops providing background on the Basic Skills Initiative and on interpreting local basic skills data.</p> <p>Participate in statewide regional events and conduct follow up workshops on campus.</p> <p>Conduct survey of faculty and staff interests and needs regarding strategies for working with basic skills students.</p> <p>Include information on strategies for working with basic skills students in New Faculty Mentoring program.</p> <p>Provide rewards for faculty and staff to pursue training in developmental education.</p>	<p>The BSI coordinator was part of an ad hoc committee which met with the VPLSD to reestablish a professional development center. In addition, several proposals have been submitted to the president by the academic senate.</p> <p>Three flex day presentations on BSI were broadcast to all three campuses; seven oral reports were made to campus groups; two Senate Briefs and a Linkages article were widely distributed. BSI information was added to the Educational Master Plan.</p> <p>BSI coordinator, steering committee members, and developmental faculty attended a number of regional meetings and shared information with interested parties.</p> <p>No action taken as there is no venue for faculty development.</p> <p>No action taken as the mentoring program has been discontinued.</p> <p>No action taken.</p>
<p>Increase academic support services and strategies that promote student learning and success, such as learning communities, linked courses, and supplemental instruction.</p>	<p>Assess effectiveness of current developmental learning communities and develop a plan to adapt and expand as indicated by the data.</p> <p>Develop a process to support collaboration between Basic Skills faculty and faculty in general to establish common goals across the curriculum.</p>	<p>The IR research assistant is currently tracking the success rate in the EOPS learning communities over several years.</p> <p>Incorporation of basic skills data in program review has been the first step in this process.</p>
<p>Create formal referral system between faculty and Student Support Services.</p>	<p>Review, adapt, and implement systematic early intervention strategies within student services for counselor/advisor contact with at-risk/poor performing students.</p>	<p>System was expanded from EOPS learning communities only to all EOPS students in developmental courses. One advisor from counseling was recently designated as a BSI advisor.</p>
<p>Assess student-learning outcomes for basic skills students.</p>	<p>Establish District-wide entry/exit assessment criteria for all basic skills courses and review regularly.</p> <p>Work with the curriculum committee to include student learning outcomes for basic skills students in all programs and disciplines.</p>	<p>Assessment will be addressed through program review.</p> <p>Student learning outcomes will be addressed through program review.</p>

## **Commentary on the 2008-2009 Action Plan**

### **Goal 1: Clarify to the entire institution and community how developmental education is included in institutional planning.**

- Although the BSI Coordinator serves on the Coordinated Planning Council, the function of the council is unclear. Since the CPC has little impact on decision-making at the institution, developmental education is not being effectively addressed in institutional planning. Decisions affecting basic skills programs and services are currently being made with little or no input from the CPC or from constituent groups.
- The “Mission and Goals for Developmental Education at CR” statement has been approved by the Academic Senate and sent on to the College Council. BSI best practices suggest that “developmental education goals and objectives [be] clearly communicated across the institution.”
- Although a minimal BSI website now exists on the college’s internal site, it is unlikely to be expanded or maintained without technical assistance. Much of the research that was completed this year has not been adequately shared. However, in mid-May the final BSI data reports were posted on the Institutional Research site.

### **Goal 2: Implement a process through IR to track retention, success, and progress rates of Basic Skills students in all classes.**

- Protocols for replicating the four primary data reports have been developed and recorded. The generation of these reports should now become a regular function of the Office of Institutional Research. Results should be posted annually and the college community notified when new reports are available.
- The success rate data may be used by faculty for establishing and validating cross-disciplinary pre-requisites for courses.

### **Goal 3: Study feasibility of District-wide ESOL program.**

- An expanded ESOL program would impact all facets of the college; thus the comprehensive report by Shaw and Huntley should be shared with the college community and thoroughly discussed by all constituents groups before any decision is made to act on the recommendations in the report.

### **Goal 4: Develop a District-wide and multi-disciplinary approach to reviewing Basic Skills curriculum and programs.**

- The BSI Steering Committee (composed of six faculty from MSE, HCOM, ALSS, B-Tech, Athletics, and Counseling and one representative from Student Services) met eleven times during the academic year. The Basic Skills Faculty Coordinator served as chair. Both the coordinator and the committee members were appointed before any job description or committee function had been developed. Although the steering committee was able to fulfill most of the objectives in the action plan, the role of the committee and its overall make-up proved to be problematic (see Recommendations).

- Directed to “oversee the planning, implementation, budgeting, and evaluation of all basic skills programs and activities,” the committee spent some time clarifying its purpose and defining its responsibilities. Currently, the committee exists under the auspices of the VP of Student Development, with no formal tie to instruction. A recommendation for the reconfiguration of the committee structure has been sent to the academic senate presidents. Ultimately, the college must decide where coordination of basic skills programs and activities and oversight of BSI funding will occur.

**Goal 5: Develop counseling, advising, and administrative capacity to oversee comprehensive assessment, placement, and orientation.**

- Two counselors and four additional advisors have been hired; it is recommended that advisors be trained specifically to work with basic skills students. In addition, they should be aware of the best practices in developmental education as set forth by BSI, and become familiar with the success rates in various courses based on student skill level. Counselors and advisors should be encouraged to attend the regional BSI conferences and student success workshops.
- Student Services is currently developing a plan to increase the proportion of first-time students participating in orientation, assessment, and advising. As the percentage of first-time students not assessed has increased from 26 percent in 2006 to 44 percent in 2008, such a plan is crucial. Online registration may account for some of the increase. Another factor may be the perception of some that placement tests discourage students from enrolling. However, an over-emphasis on FTES rather than on persistence may be counter-productive.

**Goal 6: Incorporate basic skills data and student learning outcomes in all program reviews.**

- The new comprehensive and annual program review forms to be used starting in Fall 2009 will provide data on success rate of basic skill students in all college-level courses and programs. Faculty may need training on how to interpret this data and suggestions for how they might use it as they attempt to improve those success rates. However, without institutional support for a professional development center, it is unclear how the initial training or subsequent discussions will take place (See Goal 7).

**Goal 7: Re-establish a robust professional development center with adequate support and resources and provide ongoing staff development opportunities related to pedagogy, classroom practice, current and new research in the field, and teaching innovations.**

- BSI “best practices” emphasize the importance of faculty development, yet little progress has been made in this key area. Faculty have many ideas for research and professional development activities, but without meeting space, a budget for support services, and reassigned time for designated faculty to initiate and facilitate activities, few of these ideas will come to fruition.

**Goal 8: Increase academic support services and strategies that promote student learning and success, such as learning communities, linked courses, and supplemental instruction.**

- Success and retention rates for the EOPS learning communities were studied this semester. Preliminary information from the EOPS study is just now being reviewed. There is some indication that putting the highest-risk students together is not effective. More study is required to determine what combination of students, courses, and support works best.
- Developing effective learning communities, linked courses, and supplemental instruction takes time, particularly as planning should occur well ahead of the semester in which the courses will be offered. In the past, a faculty member had reassigned time to coordinate this work. This semester, without a coordinator, setting up a new learning community for Fall 2009 was difficult, and another faculty member's plan for supplemental instruction was not completed due to lack of time and support.

**Goal 9: Create formal referral system between faculty and Student Support Services.**

- Several small attempts were made to expand the service EOPS provides to the learning communities. However, to be effective, referral must be both timely and personal. The window of opportunity to reach basic skill students once they are in trouble is often narrow. Furthermore, well-meaning calls from unknown advisors may actually discourage students. A referral system should be carefully designed and evaluated.

**Goal 10: Assess student-learning outcomes for basic skills students.**

- Although exit assessment criteria (such as competency exams) have been established for all basic skills courses, the same criteria are not always applied district wide. Assessment of student learning outcomes and program review may resolve this problem.
- Faculty will develop plans for addressing lower success rates of basic-skills-level students in their courses through program review. Thus, it will not be necessary to include student learning outcomes for basic skills students in all course outlines.

## Overview of BSI Research at CR

Thanks to the work of Karen Shepherd, the BSI research assistant, CR now knows far more about our developmental students than we did just one year earlier. Although much of that information is now contained in just four reports, the process of developing those reports was long and arduous. Cohorts of students to be tracked were defined and redefined; definitions were clarified; research questions were reworded and some times refocused; the database was cleaned up; studies were replicated multiple times for accuracy. Then the results were analyzed for usefulness. Finally hundreds of pages of data were distilled into four primary reports and several secondary reports. Without Karen's meticulous attention to detail, her quick understanding of what was needed, and her patience in working with the BSI coordinator, this work would not have been accomplished.

### Completed Research

This year's research agenda was developed around the core measures requested in the BSI self-assessment. In short, we wanted to learn as much as we could about CR students' placement, enrollment, retention, course success, persistence, and program completion patterns. We now have accurate data from multiple years on all but the program completion patterns. It is expected that the information contained in the four primary reports (Baseline Measures, Course Success Rate by Math Level, Course Success Rate by English Level, and Accuplacer Assessment) will be used by developmental faculty, by counselors, by faculty teaching college-level courses with large numbers of basic skills students enrolled, by student service professionals, by advisors, and by enrollment management. Protocols for replicating these studies are now in place, making the generation of future reports much easier. Production of these four reports should become a routine function of the Office of Institutional Research. The secondary reports provide more detailed data within specific areas. These reports should be rerun periodically as requested by users, but do not need to be done every year.

### Research for 2009-2010

Emphasis of BSI research for 2009-2010 might focus on the following areas:

- *Students not assessed.* An increasing number of new CR students do not take the placement tests. Little is known about these students, in part because information in the database is incomplete or contradictory. Since 44 percent of new students this year did not assess, we know little about them. Although some of these students may be exempt from matriculation, others are probably not. Eliminating this gap in our data should be a priority for 2009-2010.
- *Identification of "degree-seeking" students.* Completion rates for BSI are based on the number of students whose goal is identified as a degree, certificate, or transfer to a four-year college. Because we can not accurately identify which of our students are degree-seekers, we can not accurately determine completion rates.
- *Students who stop attending.* Faculty will attest that many students receive failing grades primarily because they stop attending. We need to learn more about why students drop

out of courses and why even successful students do not re-enroll at the college the following semester.

In addition, some of the research assistant's time should be spent working directly with faculty, providing research support for faculty inquiry groups and for tracking the results of pilot projects. The role of institutional research must expand to include the core areas of teaching and learning in addition to the traditional area of external reporting requirements.

### **Variable Measures of "Basic Skills"**

One additional area that needs to be addressed is clarifying for the college community the difference between various reporting instruments. BSI defines basic skills as "those foundation skills in reading, writing, mathematics and English as a Second Language, as well as learning skills and study skills, which are necessary for students to succeed in college-level work." At the local level that definition has been further defined to identify the specific courses that are included in the BSI research:

MATH 371/372, MATH 375/376, MATH 380/105/106  
ENGL 350, ENGL 150  
ENGL 353, ENGL 153 (ESL)  
READ 360  
GS 361, GS 150

The Accountability Report for Community Colleges (ARCC) defines basic skills differently and tracks different cohorts. For example, ARCC does not consider 100-level courses as basic skills courses because they are degree applicable. In addition, course completion rates are based on students who have already completed twelve or more units and are enrolled in a college-level English or math course. To complicate the matter even more, TOPS codes, which include such courses as adaptive physical education for disabled students as basic skills, differ from the new CB21 coding that will go into effect next year. CB21 coding will apply to all English, math, reading, and ESL courses below transfer level and will designate how many levels below transfer-level each course is. This may mean that Math 120, for example, which fulfills the AA/AS degree requirement for math, will count as a basic skills course for one report but not for another.

Having so many different definitions of basic skills can be confusing; however, the main point to remember is not to compare data from one report with that from another. Each report serves a specific function. The college's in-house data is probably the most specific, as well as the most useful, to faculty and counselors, while the ARCC data is best for comparing the college to its peer groups.

## **Coordinator's Recommendations and Concerns**

### **Move Oversight of the Basic Skills Initiative to VP of Instruction**

Due to administrative reorganization, the VP of Student Development currently has oversight for BSI. Unfortunately, the current structure leaves faculty without any administrative support for implementing BSI projects. For example, without a center for professional development, we were unable to move forward with workshops on faculty inquiry groups or on pedagogical best practices for working with basic skills students. In addition, the future of the BSI steering committee has been left in limbo, and as of May 15, there is no longer a faculty coordinator. Not only has it been made difficult for faculty to participate in BSI, but we have actually lost ground in our ability to affect change in improving student success rates. For example, this year we have lost a faculty coordinator of learning communities and we have lost the New Faculty Mentoring program. As none of these academic activities fall under the umbrella of student development, they have not had a strong administrative advocate. It is strongly recommended that BSI and the steering committee be under the purview of the Academic Senate and the VP of Instruction.

### **Reconfigure the Basic Skills Steering Committee**

One task of this year's ad hoc committee was to determine the committee's long-term function and membership. A draft document now exists. To be effective, the steering committee must be composed of the faculty and staff who work most closely with basic skills students.

Administrative support of this committee is essential. Furthermore, it is currently unclear how the work of this committee ties in to decisions at the college regarding basic skills. If the committee is to "oversee the planning, implementation, budgeting, and evaluation of all basic skills programs and activities" as originally charged, it must have an active role in decision making. This year, decisions came down as mandates without consultation with the committee. If top-down decision making is the goal, having a steering committee at all may be pointless.

### **Hire a BSI Research Assistant**

In Spring 2008, CR lacked the data necessary to complete the Baseline Measure section of the state-mandated BSI self assessment. Except for classroom research conducted by individual instructors, CR had little documented evidence about our developmental students. In Fall 2008, BSI funds were used to hire a research assistant to work under the auspices of the Office of Institutional Research on a research agenda set by the steering committee. Much has been accomplished. More remains to be done. The contract for our current assistant expires on June 30, 2009, and she does not wish to renew her contract. For the work to continue, a part-time BSI research assistant, working with faculty on faculty concerns, is essential. Furthermore, the work now posted on the IR website will need to be updated annually. The transparency of the reports is essential. If reports generated in the future are done without collaboration, the results are unlikely to be well received.

### **Reinstate Faculty Drops and FW Grades**

Currently, the last opportunity for an instructor to disqualify a student is at census. Since basic skills students rarely officially withdraw from a course, students who stop attending at any time after census are considered retained and receive a grade of F rather than a W. As a result both retention and success rates are distorted. In the past, faculty could drop students who were no longer attending from the class rosters up to the last date for student-initiated drops. The

education code also allows for FW grades for students who stop attending between the last date for student-initiated drop and final exams. Activating both of these processes would allow the college more accurately to measure retention and success.

### **Re-establish a Center of Professional Development**

Professional development is one of the cornerstones of the Basic Skills Initiative. In fact, twenty-one of the “best practices” identified in the BSI handbook (Poppy Copy) focus exclusively on staff development. Yet administrative support for professional development has been eliminated rather than expanded. Reassigned time was taken away from the coordinator of professional development and the new faculty mentoring programs. Physical space for the Center for Teaching Excellence (lost last year due to earthquake hazard) has not been reallocated. All CTE support services were eliminated from the budget. Proposals for a comprehensive professional development center have been repeatedly rejected by the president.

CR may well be the only community college in California that lacks some type of center for teaching excellence. If we are to improve student learning, CR must foster a “culture of inquiry.” One way to promote this is through Faculty Inquiry Groups, in which faculty identify and investigate questions about their students' learning and success. In addition, new full-time faculty and associate faculty need orientation and support in meeting the needs of underprepared students. Many exciting staff development projects have been discussed, but without institutional support, they are unlikely to be enacted.

### **Promote Collaboration**

In the past, faculty and student service professionals have often been at odds in their attempts to create a successful experience for at-risk students. Fortunately, many at the college now share a common understanding of how best to assist our students. However, lack of collaboration and coordination continues to be a problem. Examples of actions taken without collaboration include the many linked courses initially scheduled for Fall 09 with no input from faculty; the removal of the General Studies discipline from academics to student service without discussion with faculty; the development of a freshman seminar without faculty input; development of a faculty mentoring proposal without input from faculty; changes in academic support services without input from faculty. Appropriate collaboration results in better-informed decisions; lack of coordination leads to duplication of efforts or to the development of policies at cross purposes with each other. As the Poppy Copy points out, “the single greatest problem with developmental education . . . is the lack of coordinated, focused, and systematic effort.” While other colleges have made the Basic Skills Initiative the central focus of an institutional effort, activities at CR have become increasingly fragmented.

The Basic Skills Initiative offers an unprecedented opportunity for improving the learning outcomes of our at-risk students. It is indeed unfortunate that College of the Redwoods, through lack of administrative support, collaboration, and planning, has severely diminished the ability of the college to make meaningful progress in implementing the best practices in developmental education as set forth by the Basic Skills Initiative. If BSI is to exist meaningfully in the future at CR, one critical question remains. Will the college, acting as an advocate for its underprepared students, take the initiative to make BSI an institutional priority?

## The State of Basic Skills Research at College of the Redwoods as of June 2009

### I. Defining Basic Skills

What are basic skills? According to one definition provided by the Chancellor’s Office “Basic skills are those foundation skills in reading, writing, mathematics and English as a Second Language, as well as learning skills and study skills, which are necessary for students to succeed in college-level work.”<sup>1</sup> Using this definition as a guide, the Basic Skills Committee in academic year 2008-09, headed by Judie Hinman, selected the following list of courses as the set of “basic skills” classes at CR:

<b>subject area</b>	<b>course</b>	<b>previous course names or equivalent courses</b>	<b>short title</b>	<b>levels below transfer-level</b>
Reading	READ-360	GS-360	Basic Academic Literacy	3
English	ENGL-350		Reading & Writing Skills	2
	ENGL-353		ESL Reading & Writing Skills	2
	ENGL-150		Precollegiate Reading/Writing	1
	ENGL-153		ESL Precollegiate Read/Write	1
Mathematics	MATH-372	MATH-371	Arith for the College Student	4
	MATH-376	MATH-375	Pre-Algebra	3
	MATH-380	MATH-105; MATH-106	Elementary Algebra	2
General Studies	GS-150		Learning Success	n/a
	GS-361		B Skills: Life Work & College	n/a

In the summer of 2008 the Institutional Research department began doing research on these classes under the direction of Martha Davis. In September 2008 Karen Shepherd was hired as a temporary, half-time researcher for the Basic Skills Initiative, and she continued to gather and analyze data about these classes and the students who take them.

### II. Who are the “Basic Skills” Students?

This question is a more complicated than it seems. At any given time a certain number of our students are enrolled in a basic skills course, one of the classes listed above. This is one group of students we call “basic skills students.” At the same time many more students who have taken basic skills classes in the past are still enrolled at CR although they are not currently taking basic skills classes. And then we have students who have been “placed”, through the assessment process or by other means, into basic skills math or English or both, but have not yet enrolled in any of the basic skills classes. It is important to be aware of the criteria used to designate

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<sup>1</sup> *Basic Skills as a Foundation for Student Success in California Community Colleges*, July 2007 (2nd edition): p. 4

students as basic skills students when looking at the research questions and the data presented in the various reports that have come out of our research. The students studied for one question are not necessarily equivalent to the students studied for another question.

Also, there is a very wide range of skill levels encompassed under the label of Basic Skills. One basic skills student may be fully competent in transfer-level English but also enrolled in Math-380, one level below college-level math.<sup>2</sup> Another student may have been assessed at the lowest levels in both math and English. Since our lowest levels essentially have no bottom, he could be at *very* low skill levels. Between these two examples we have students with many different combinations of skill levels in math and English. The Basic Skills Initiative hopes to improve the outcomes for all of these students. But it is obvious that the students do not all face the same challenges. Yet, questions the state has asked us to answer generally lump all the basic skills students into a single group. And much of the research done at CR this past year also treated all basic skills students as a single group. But we have also created some reports which looked at the students at each level of English and each level of math separately.

No work has been done, so far, that attempts to tell us more about these students in terms of demographic information such as age, gender, city of residence and so on. Even though we have not done this research we do not expect to find much difference between basic skills students and all students on these types of measures because most of the students at CR *are* basic skills students according to at least one of the definitions given above.

### III. Assessment

IR looked at the number of students who take assessments and where they have been placed in English and mathematics over the last several years. The trend over the last three fall terms appears to show that as our enrollments increase, the numbers of students who are taking assessments is decreasing. Here is some comparison data from those terms:

<b>TERM:</b>	<b>2006F</b>	<b>2007F</b>	<b>2008F</b>
total enrolled students:	5807	6167	6676
total NEW students:	1665	1885	2021
new students assessed:	1229	1283	1126
	73.8%	68.1%	55.7%

We are not able to say why more students aren't being assessed. We tried to find a cohort of students of whom we could say that all these students are seeking a degree, a certificate, or transfer to a 4-year college. Such students need to pass college-level math and English and are supposed to complete matriculation steps. The first such step is assessment. We had trouble with finding such a group, however, for reasons which are explained in more detail in the section on Data Problems near the end of this report.

Assessment research that we have completed is based almost entirely on two “virtual” fields<sup>3</sup> in the Colleague Student database named R04.STU.ENGL.PLACEMENT and

<sup>2</sup> At CR the first “college-level” math course is Math-120 which is still one level below transfer level courses. Contrast this with the English setup where our first “college-level” course and our first transfer-level course are the *same* class, English-1A.

<sup>3</sup> In Colleague a virtual field is one which is actually calculated at the time it is invoked instead of being a stored value in the database.

R04.STU.MATH.PLACEMENT. These two fields are generated by BASIC coding that looks at the assessment instrument scores and course equivalencies which can be generated by those scores, or may also be entered directly. For example, there is a course equivalency called EQ.MATH-105/106 which is automatically placed onto the student's record when he scores high enough on the Accuplacer algebra assessment. The equivalency may also be entered directly onto a student's record based on transcript information or tests taken elsewhere. This equivalency means "equivalent to having passed Math-105 or Math-106"<sup>4</sup>, *or* ready to take Math-120. In fact, the student with such an equivalency will have a value in R04.STU.MATH.PLACEMENT of "**Math 120.**" Not all students have test scores or equivalencies, but they do all have values in these two virtual fields. When there is no data on which to base a placement the value will be "No Tests," and when there is data but no clear placement as a result of that data the value will be "Unknown." An example of a legitimate reason for an unknown value would be if a student took the reading assessment but not the writing assessment because English placement is based on the scores in both. Here is a chart explaining all the possible placement values with the basic skills levels shown in color:

Subject area	Placement value	Meaning
Reading/English/ESL	Engl 360	should take READ-360
	Engl 350/353	should take ENGL-350 or ENGL-353
	Engl 150/153	should take ENGL-150 or ENGL-153
	Engl 1A	ready to take ENGL-1A
	Engl 1B	has already passed ENGL-1A
Mathematics	Math 371/372	should take MATH-372
	Math 375/376	should take MATH-376
	Math 105/106	should take MATH-380
	Math 120	ready to take MATH-120
	Math 22/25/30	ready to take several transfer-level math classes
	Math 50A	ready to take calculus

So what did we determine about assessment into basic skills classes? Here is a summary covering the last three fall terms:

TERM:	2006F	2007F	2008F
distinct new students assessed into developmental classes	1030	1029	989
<i>as a percent of all new students</i>	61.9%	54.6%	48.9%
<i>as a percent of new, assessed students</i>	83.8%	80.2%	87.8%

<sup>4</sup> These courses are currently replaced by Math-380.

The numbers combine those who assessed at the basic skills level in only one of the subject areas with those who placed into basic skills in both math and English. Here is a more-detailed look at assessments in Fall 2008:

English Placement of NEW Students in Fall 2008							
Engl 1B	Engl 1A	Engl 150/153	Engl 350/353	Read 360	No Tests	Unknown	Total
6	232	381	330	117	58	3	1127
0.5%	20.6%	33.8%	29.3%	10.4%	5.1%	0.3%	100%

Math Placement of NEW Students in Fall 2008								
Math 50A	Math 22/25/30	Math 120	Math 380	Math 375/376	Math 371/372	No Tests	Unknown	Total
18	144	77	379	382	37	87	3	1127
1.6%	12.8%	6.8%	33.6%	33.9%	3.3%	7.7%	0.3	100%

As so many of the students who are tested do place below college-level it is natural to wonder about the other 44% of new students in the most-recent fall term who were *not* assessed. Did they really not need assessment? Did they struggle in classes for which they were not prepared? Some of our research did look at class success levels for the “Unknown” and “No Tests” groups of students and found that they were doing just as well (or even better) than the students for whom we have placements. Here is one example, from a large report better viewed on-line<sup>5</sup>, that shows the overall success rates for students in all classes in the Math, Science and Engineering division.

Success Rates of Students by Math Level: Totals for all MSE Division Classes					
Transfer-level	MATH-120	MATH-380	MATH-376	MATH-372	Unknown (includes those never assessed)
73%	61%	61%	54%	57%	63%

But the Unknown group is a mixed group of students, one assumes, containing both students who waived assessment because they already have college-level skills and/or extensive previous college experience as well as students who do not have college-level skills. It is possible that the first set of students does quite well and pulls up the average success rate for the whole group of non-assessed students. This is all guesswork without more information about the students who do not take assessment. The only things we know for sure are that a large majority of the students whom we test are not ready to take college-level math and English when they first come to CR and a fairly large minority of students has not been assessed at all.

<sup>5</sup> Report is named [bsi\\_success\\_percent\\_by\\_math\\_level\\_mse.pdf](#) and is available on the IR website, using the link to Basic Skills, along with reports for all other divisions and another set of similar reports by English level. More data from these reports is shown in section VIII of this document.

#### IV. The Basic Skills English Classes

At CR the series of basic skills English classes, from lowest to highest, is Reading-360, English-350 and English-150. Only a small number of students start at the Reading-360 level<sup>6</sup>. In Fall 2008 117 students, or about 10% of all new students, placed into this level of English, and 49 students took the class. These are not necessarily the same students as additional research has shown that many of the students do not take their basic skills courses right away. The students enrolled in the class in Fall 2008 would have included a mix of new and continuing students. 53% of those students passed the class. English-350 had an enrollment six times as great, 260 students, and 63% of them passed. 416 students took English-150 with a success rate of 56%. Success rates in all three of these classes vary from term to term, and among the individual sections. But looked at over time about 55% of students are passing in all three of these basic skills English classes.

<b>Course Success Rates for Basic Skills Classes – 2008F</b>			
	<b>A-C or Credit</b>	<b>D or No Credit</b>	<b>Total Students</b>
<b>Engl-150</b>	233 56.0%	183 44.0%	416
<b>Engl-350</b>	163 62.7%	97 37.3%	260
<b>Read-360</b>	26 53.1%	23 46.9%	49

This means, of course, that over 40% of students did *not* complete their classes with a passing grade. We looked at how many of those failing students repeated the class in the next year. Averaging the two cohorts of students studied, approximately 30% of the failed English-150 and English-350 students repeat the class in the next three terms (including summer term) but less than 9% of the failed Reading-360 students repeat the class in that period.

<b>Originally failed class in 2006F</b>	<b>Repeated in the next 3 terms</b>	<b>Did not repeat</b>	<b>Total Students</b>
<b>ENGL-150</b>	39 24.7%	119 75.3%	158
<b>ENGL-350</b>	45 31.5%	98 68.5%	143
<b>GS-360</b>	9 11.8%	67 88.2%	76

<sup>6</sup> Until Spring 2008, Reading-360 was known as GS-360.

Originally failed class in 2007F	Repeated in the next 3 terms	Did not repeat	Total Students
<b>ENGL-150</b>	59 31.7%	127 68.3%	186
<b>ENGL-350</b>	42 32.8%	86 67.2%	128
<b>GS-360</b>	2 3.4%	57 96.6%	59

Another question we investigated was whether or not students who start in basic skills English are advancing to English-1A. We looked at students who took English-350 in any term from fall 2005 to Fall 2007. These enrollment terms were chosen to allow at least 2 additional regular terms after the English-350 term in which students would have been able to take additional, higher English classes.<sup>7</sup> The research told us that 42% of those students managed to take English-150 by Spring 2009 while less than 16% made it to an English-1A class. With a longer time frame these numbers would probably increase a bit.

Progress in English of Students who took ENGL-350 in 2005F – 2007S				
Did not enroll in ENGL-150	Enrolled in ENGL-150 thru 2009S			Total Students
	A-C or Credit	D or No Credit	Total	
691 57.9%	300 25.1%	203 17.0%	503 42.1%	1194
Did not enroll in ENGL-1A	Enrolled in ENGL-1A thru 2009S			Total Students
	A-C or Credit	D or No Credit	Total	
1009 84.5%	129 10.8%	56 4.7%	185 15.5%	1194

As an alternate way of investigating this question we looked at the beginning English level for students who were enrolled in English-1A over several semesters (2006S-2008S.) Only 1% of the English-1A students had started with Reading-360. 15% of the students had taken English-350 as their initial English class and 34% of the students began with English-150 as their lowest-level English class. The majority of English-1A students at any time are students who placed at that level to begin with. The good news is that those who had to pass one to several basic skills English classes before taking English-1A had just as much chance of passing the college-level

<sup>7</sup> We only had data through Fall 2008 when this was first studied; the report excerpt shown now also includes Spring 2009.

English as the students who *started* at that level of English. 64% of all students are passing English-1A.<sup>8</sup>

Initial level of English for Engl-1A students, and effect on success rates in Engl-1A			
lowest English class in the series	A-C or Credit	D or No Credit	Total Students
Engl-1A	715 62.7%	425 37.3%	1,140
Engl-150 or Engl-153	531 66.2%	271 33.8%	802
Engl-350 or Engl-353	231 64.9%	125 35.1%	356
Read-360 or GS-360	20 62.5%	12 37.5%	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,497</b> 64.2%	<b>833</b> 35.8%	<b>2,330</b> 100%

#### V. The Basic Skills Math Classes

We have 3 levels of basic skills math at CR. Because of recent course number changes it can be confusing to discuss these courses. The lowest level math is a 4-unit course, Math-372. Until Spring 2008 the math department also offered Math-371 which was a 3-unit course at the same level. The placements for mathematics still reflect the old scheme so that the lowest level placement is “Math 371/372.”<sup>9</sup> The next level of math is currently Math-376. There is a similar situation here as Math-375 was also offered at this level, for one unit less, until Spring 2008. The final level of basic skills math, one level below college-level and two levels below transfer level math courses, is currently Math-380. Until the 2008/09 academic year this class did not exist. Instead students had the choice of Math-105 for 4 units (discontinued after Fall 2007) or Math-106 for 5 units. Math-380 is also a 5 unit course.

Early research done by John Johnston for the Basic Skills Committee did look at the differences between groups of students in these classes that were at the same level. For example, using over 3 years of data on student enrollment and success rates in math classes, J. Johnston found that students who took Math-372 advanced to the next level of math at higher rates than those who took Math-371. The Math-372 students also had better success rates in the next math class than the students who satisfied the prerequisite with Math-371. There were also three times as many

<sup>8</sup> It is interesting that the group with the highest success in Engl-1A is students who first passed Engl-150 at CR. This is good, of course, but might it indicate that our standards in Engl-150 are a little too high? This could mean that the minimum assessment to enter directly into Engl-1A is a bit *low*, or it might mean that we ask for a greater level of competency to pass Engl-150 than is strictly necessary, thus slowing students down students who are trying to progress through basic skills English to college English.

<sup>9</sup> See the chart in section III of this document.

students in the Math-372 classes as in the Math-371 classes; in the fall and spring terms from Fall 2004 to Fall 2007 there were 147 students in Math-371 versus 397 students in Math-372. The situation was similar for the other pairs of math classes which today are replaced by a single class. Wherever the classes were studied separately we found that more students took the higher-unit class, and those who did had higher rates of enrollment in the math class at the next level up, and had higher rates of success in their next math class. But since CR no longer offers these pairs of similar classes now we usually combine these old classes in our research and treat them as equivalent to our current math classes.

In Fall 2008 only 3% of new, assessed students (37 students) placed into the lowest level of mathematics, Math-372. 34% (382 students) were placed into the next lowest math, Math-376, and another 34% (379 students) placed into Math-380. 62 students took Math-372 and 53% passed the class. 307 students enrolled in Math-376 with a success rate of 56%, and 408 students took Math-380, while 63% passed that class. Please keep in mind that the students in each class would have been a mixture of new and continuing students; many of the students who were new in Fall 2008 did not enroll in the math class where they were placed in their first term.

<b>Course Success Rates for Basic Skills Classes – 2008F</b>			
	<b>A-C or Credit</b>	<b>D or No Credit</b>	<b>Total Students</b>
<b>Math-380</b>	258 63.2%	150 30.8%	408
<b>Math-376</b>	173 56.4%	134 43.6%	307
<b>Math-372</b>	33 53.2%	29 48.6%	62

When we looked at how many students were repeating the basic skills math classes they had failed we had to get clever about it because of all the course number changes. If a student failed Math-105, for example, they needed to be counted as a repeat if they subsequently took Math-105 again or took Math-106 or Math-380. Counting only students who repeated within the next three terms (spring, summer or the subsequent fall) we found that of the students who originally took math-372 (or equivalent) in Fall 2006, 24% repeated, but only 14% of the unsuccessful students from Fall 2007 re-took the class in that time period. Repeats of Math-376 (or equivalent) were better: 29% for the 2006F students and 32% for the 2007F students. Repeats of Math-380 (or equivalent) within 3 terms have been in the range of 36-39%.

Originally failed class in 2006F	Repeated in the next 3 terms	Did not repeat	Total Students
<b>MATH-105</b>	22 59.5%	15 40.5%	37
<b>MATH-106</b>	36 31.9%	77 68.1%	113
combined	<b>38.7%</b>	<b>61.3%</b>	<b>150</b>
<b>MATH-375</b>	9 34.6%	17 65.4%	26
<b>MATH-376</b>	23 27.1%	62 72.9%	85
combined	<b>28.8%</b>	<b>71.2%</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>MATH-371</b>	4 40.0%	6 60.0%	10
<b>MATH-372</b>	1 9.1%	10 90.9%	11
combined	<b>23.8%</b>	<b>76.2%</b>	<b>21</b>

Originally failed class in 2007F	Repeated in the next 3 terms	Did not repeat	Total Students
<b>MATH-105</b>	4 44.4%	5 55.6%	9
<b>MATH-106</b>	51 35.2%	94 64.8%	145
combined	<b>35.7%</b>	<b>64.3%</b>	<b>154</b>
<b>MATH-375</b>	12 50.0%	12 50.0%	24
<b>MATH-376</b>	26 27.4%	69 72.6%	95
combined	<b>31.9%</b>	<b>68.1%</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>MATH-371</b>	5 31.3%	11 68.8%	16
<b>MATH-372</b>	0 0.0%	20 100.0%	20
combined	<b>13.9%</b>	<b>86.1%</b>	<b>36</b>

Looking at students who were enrolled in Math-375 (or equivalent) in the terms from Fall 2005 to Fall 2007, and what math they took after that, we found that 44% of the students had taken the next level of math, Math-380 (or equivalent) through Spring 2009. Only 20% of those students had also managed to take Math-120 by that time. Numbers can be expected to increase a bit with more time for students to pick up the later classes in the series.

<b>Progress in math of Students who took Math 375/376 in 2005F – 2007S</b>				
<b>Did not enroll in Math-380 or equiv.</b>	<b>Enrolled in Math-380 or equiv. thru 2009S</b>			<b>Total Students</b>
	A-C or Credit	D or No Credit	Total	
578 55.8%	284 27.4%	173 16.7%	457 44.2%	1035
<b>Did not enroll in Math-120</b>	<b>Enrolled in Math-120 thru 2009S</b>			
	A-C or Credit	D or No Credit	Total	
831 80.3%	129 12.5%	75 7.2%	204 19.7%	1035

However, if we look at the students who were enrolled in Math-120 classes from 2006F to 2008F we find the following:

- 5% of the Math-120 students had started with our lowest math, Math-372 or equivalent; these students had a success rate of 53% in Math-120
- 25% of the Math-120 students had started with our 2<sup>nd</sup> lowest math, Math-376 or equivalent; these students also had a success rate of 53% in Math-120
- 36% of the Math-120 students had started with Math-380 or equivalent; these students had a success rate of 54% in Math-120
- 33% of the Math-120 students had started at the Math-120 level; these students had a success rate of 56% in Math-120

We can see that few students who start at our lowest level of math are making it to college-level math. However, the progress to Math-120 from basic skills math looks better than the numbers for a similar measure in English. And student success rates in Math-120 do not vary greatly depending on the initial placement in math, although those who *start* at the Math-120 level are passing at a slightly higher rate.

Initial level of math for Math-120 students, and effect on success rates in Math-120			
lowest math class in the series	A-C or Credit	D or No Credit	Total Students
Math-120	348 55.8%	276 44.2%	624
Math-380 or equiv.	362 53.9%	310 46.1%	672
Math-376 or equiv.	253 53.4%	221 46.6%	474
Math-372 or equiv.	53 53.0%	47 47.0%	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>1016</b> 54.3%	<b>854</b> 45.7%	<b>1870</b> 100%

## VI. Student Persistence and Student Success in Other (non-basic skills) Classes

A question which was examined in many different ways was: How are the students who assess at the basic skills level doing in comparison to all students? As *most* students who go through the assessment process are assessed at a basic skills level (see section on assessment, above) this question was later expanded to allow us to compare the basic skills students who immediately start taking the basic skills classes versus the students who also assessed as needing basic skills but did not enroll in the recommended classes in their first term. We did not get into details on this grouping; all students who assessed as basic skills in either math or English, and who were at any level of basic skills, were lumped together. And they were considered as having “enrolled in BS class where placed” if they took either the math *or* the English where we placed them. This methodology may have excluded some students who were placed at one level of BS English but took a different BS English class. An example of this scenario would be someone who was “placed” at the English-150 level but who enrolled in English-350 instead. This does happen and we don’t know from the data we have if it is because a student placed himself lower out of worry that he wasn’t really prepared for the higher class, or if an advisor or English instructor has advised the student to take a lower class than where the placement tests put them. In any case we did not count a student as having taken a BS class where placed unless it was the actual class at the level she placed into.

Two particular measures were looked at. The first was fall-to-fall persistence. We found that students who enrolled in a BS class where placed their first fall term, in Fall 2006 and Fall 2007, were among the highest groups in persistence rates. In both years 51% of such students persisted to the next fall term, and this figure was 10% higher than the persistence rate for all students. The only group with higher persistence was those who had assessed at college-level (with a few unknowns added); this group had a 53% persistence rate from 2006F to 2007F and a 57%

persistence rate from 2007F to 2008F. Students who were never assessed had persistence rates of only 24-25%.

New Students Enrolled Fall 2006		Persisted to 2007F	Did not persist	Total
<b>Assessed BS</b>	enrolled in BS class where placed	271 51.4%	256 48.6%	527
	all others	211 41.9%	292 58.1%	503
	Total	482 46.8%	548 53.2%	1,030
<b>Not Assessed BS</b>	All students	106 53.3%	93 46.7%	199
<b>Students with no assessment</b>	All Students	104 23.9%	332 76.1%	436
<b>Total</b>		692 41.6%	973 58.4%	1,665 100%

New Students Enrolled Fall 2007		Persisted to 2008F	Did not persist	Total
<b>Assessed BS</b>	enrolled in BS class where placed	275 50.5%	270 49.5%	545
	all others	203 41.9%	281 58.1%	484
	Total	478 46.5%	551 53.5%	1,029
<b>Not Assessed BS</b>	All students	147 57.4%	109 42.6%	256
<b>Students with no assessment</b>	All Students	149 24.8%	451 75.2%	600
<b>Total</b>		774 41.1%	1,111 58.9%	1,885 100%

This is not, of course, enough data to really draw conclusions. Perhaps the students who were never assessed include a large number of community members coming to CR for just a few classes which do not take more than a year to complete. Maybe the students who start taking the BS English and math right away are simply the more motivated, more serious students from the outset, and that is reflected in their persistence. Or perhaps we should be advising students not to

put these classes off as it affects their chances of continuing in college long enough to reach their goals. If we knew what goals these people were working towards it might help us to draw better conclusions from this data. It might also be useful to examine the basic-skills-by-assessment group more closely to see if the *level* of basic skills matters when we consider the question of students who did or did not take their BS class(es) right away. For example, does it matter as much if a student placed at the English-150 level takes that class right away as it matters if the English-350 student takes *that* course right away? The English-350 students have more work to get through in all, and they are also at more of a disadvantage for their other classes until they improve their reading and writing skills, so perhaps we would see a bigger difference for that group. At this time we simply don't know.

In a related question we looked to see how these same students were doing in transfer-level classes. A transfer-level class is any class that transfers to the University of California or the State University (CSU) system for credit. Results of this study showed that students placed into basic skills who took the BS class where placed did do better in their transfer-level classes over the first academic year. For students new in Fall 2006, the success rate in transfer-level classes was 66% for the students who also enrolled in basic skills where placed, and only 57% for those who did not enroll in basic skills. The students who were not assessed at basic skills level had a 78% success rate while those with no assessment succeeded 68% of the time. When the success rates in transfer-level classes were calculated for a second academic year all groups of students increased their success rates over the first year. It is likely that there is a weeding-out effect in that the students still here a second year are those who are more motivated or who started out doing well enough in their first year to not get discouraged and drop out. We found that the success rate in transfer-level courses in the second year for the students who were assessed BS when they started and who took at least one of the basic skills classes where placed right away was 70%, a very respectable rate. Still, we cannot be sure if we have discovered a trend; in the group of students who were new in Fall 2007 those who took the BS class where placed had a success rate in their transfer-level classes only 1% greater than those who did not enroll in basic skills. This is in contrast to the 8% greater success rate we found in the group from the previous fall. Conclusion: more study is needed.

New Students Enrolled Fall 2006 – transfer level classes		2006-2007			2007-2008		
		A-C or Credit	D or No Credit	Total Enrolled	A-C or Credit	D or No Credit	Total Enrolled
<b>Assessed BS</b>	enrolled in BS class where placed	1126 65.6%	591 34.4%	1717	1055 69.3%	467 30.7%	1522
	all others	1092 57.3%	815 42.7%	1907	725 67.7%	346 32.3%	1071
	Total	2218 61.2%	1406 38.8%	3624	1780 68.6%	813 31.4%	2593
<b>Not Assessed BS</b>	All students	888 77.8%	253 22.2%	1141	634 81.9%	140 18.1%	774
<b>Students with no assessment</b>	All Students	742 67.6%	356 32.4%	1098	241 70.3%	102 29.7%	343
<b>Total</b>		3848 65.6%	2015 34.4%	5863	2655 71.6%	1055 28.4%	3710 100%

New Students Enrolled Fall 2007 – transfer level classes		2007-2008			2008-2009		
		A-C or Credit	D or No Credit	Total Enrolled	A-C or Credit	D or No Credit	Total Enrolled
<b>Assessed BS</b>	enrolled in BS class where placed	1360 64.4%	752 35.6%	2112	1106 71.1%	450 28.9%	1556
	all others	1238 62.8%	732 37.2%	1970	786 68.1%	369 31.9%	1155
	Total	2598 63.6%	1484 36.4%	4082	1892 69.8%	819 30.2%	2711
<b>Not Assessed BS</b>	All students	1108 76.0%	349 24.0%	1457	743 77.8%	212 22.2%	955
<b>Students with no assessment</b>	All Students	953 61.4%	599 38.6%	1552	393 67.5%	189 32.5%	582
<b>Total</b>		4659 65.7%	2432 34.3%	7091	3028 71.3%	1220 28.7%	4248 100%

## VII. Graduation and Transfer Rates

Several of the measures suggested in the state manual, *Basic Skills as a Foundation for Student Success in California Community Colleges*, advised us to track students who had successfully completed a basic skills course with a passing grade to see what their graduation and transfer rates were down the road. We looked at the cohort of students who passed one of the basic skills classes in Fall 2003, and also the cohort of students in Fall 2004 meeting the same criteria. We counted the number of students who

- a) received a certificate of completion (CC) or certificate of achievement (CA),
- b) received an AA or AS degree, or
- c) transferred to a 4-year college

and we followed these students on these measures for all the years since the base year in which their cohort was enrolled.

The only certificates and degrees we have data for are those awarded by CR, so if students transfer to another community college we do not know if they achieve one of these goals eventually. For transfer data we used a file obtained from NSC (National Student Clearinghouse.) The file reports transfers to any other college and it includes the information on the type of school, either 2-year or 4-year; we used just the data on transfers to 4-year schools. The selection criteria for the student cohorts result in groups that contain both new and continuing students. And we don't know how many of the students were *seeking* a certificate, degree or transfer.<sup>10</sup> But of the students studied, after four years only 7% of the fall 2003 cohort and 6% of the fall 2004 cohort had obtained a certificate. The numbers of students who were awarded an associate degree were better: 21% by four years for the 2003 cohort and 17% for the 2004 cohort. And after four years 20% of the 2003 cohort had transferred to a 4-year college while 16% of the 2004 cohort had transferred. By 5 years out and 6 years out, the numbers are slightly higher, but the amount of increase is small in these subsequent years. We looked at these measures separately, but we do know that there is overlap between the groups. In other words, some students achieved a certificate *and* a degree, and some achieved a degree and also transferred.

*Please note that for all of the following tables **inclusive** totals of awards or transfers within a time frame should include the totals for all the lesser periods. For example, certs awarded within 3 years should really include the totals of all those earned in 1, 2 or 3 years.*

All Passing BS Students from 2003F							
Cert awarded within 1 year	Cert awarded within 2 years	Cert awarded within 3 years	Cert awarded within 4 years	Cert awarded within 5 years	Cert awarded within 6 years	No certificate	Total
7	24	19	14	7	4	809	883
0.9%	2.7%	2.3%	1.6%	0.9%	0.4%	91.2%	

All Passing BS Students from 2003F							
Degree awarded within 1 year	Degree awarded within 2 years	Degree awarded within 3 years	Degree awarded within 4 years	Degree awarded within 5 years	Degree awarded within 6 years	No Degree	Total
26	68	60	33	30	4	668	883
3.1%	7.7%	6.7%	3.7%	3.7%	0.4%	74.6%	

<sup>10</sup> See section on Data Problems, below.

All Passing BS Students from 2003F						
Transferred within 1 year	Transferred within 2 years	Transferred within 3 years	Transferred within 4 years	Transferred within 5 years	No record of transfer	Total
47	58	40	29	15	694	883
5.3%	7.0%	4.5%	3.2%	1.7%	78.3%	

All Passing BS Students from 2004F						
Cert awarded within 1 year	Cert awarded within 2 years	Cert awarded within 3 years	Cert awarded within 4 years	Cert awarded within 5 years	No certificate	Total
4	19	19	17	3	896	957
0.4%	2.1%	2.1%	1.8%	0.3%	93.4%	

All Passing BS Students from 2004F						
Degree awarded within 1 year	Degree awarded within 2 years	Degree awarded within 3 years	Degree awarded within 4 years	Degree awarded within 5 years	No Degree	Total
14	53	60	33	5	797	957
1.5%	5.5%	6.2%	3.5%	0.5%	82.8%	

All Passing BS Students from 2004F					
Transferred within 1 year	Transferred within 2 years	Transferred within 3 years	Transferred within 4 years	No record of transfer	Total
28	49	58	21	801	957
2.9%	5.1%	6.1%	2.3%	83.6%	

Other measures used by the state which are often lumped in with these 3 measures of “graduation” rates are those for “Transfer Directed” or “Transfer Prepared” students. Transfer Directed is defined as students who have completed transfer-level math and English. Transfer Prepared is defined as students who have completed 60+ transferrable units with a 2.0 or better GPA. We have not yet tried to calculate these measures for any population of basic skills students, so this may be another avenue to explore for future research.

#### VIII. Affect of English and Math “levels” on Course Success

Very few classes at CR have an English or math prerequisite except for classes in the Math and English departments. In some other cases a specific level of math or English is suggested as recommended preparation. The Basic Skills Committee was quite interested in data on what level of math and English are necessary for good outcomes in our other courses. For one project which addressed this question we developed a database containing all students who had been enrolled at CR in terms from 2005F to 2008F and which contained the *levels* of math and English that were correct as of each term. For example, if student John Doe was a new student in 2005F and had been placed in Engl-350 by assessment, then his English level for 2005F was “ENGL-350.” If nothing had changed in 2006S then his English level was still “ENGL-350.” If he took and passed that class in the Spring 2006 term, then for 2006F his English level was

changed to “ENGL-150”. When he took and passed *that* class then his new English level, effective with the start of the next term, was changed to “ENGL-1A”, and so on.

Once the database had been created we used it to examine student success in all classes at CR. The reports created are also available for a single division. Side-by-side comparisons of the success rates for students at the highest to lowest level of English can be seen in the report by English level, and a comparable report tracks success by math level. Many students fell into an “Unknown” category. This meant they had no placement and no course work that would allow us to determine their level of math or English. But those students are also reported. You might look at them as a control group in a sense; if the “Unknown” students did as well in a class as those with specific math or English skills at a level we *think* is important for that class then maybe it is not so important. On the other hand, the reports may also show us that some classes where there are no prerequisites or recommended preparation in math or English need to have them added. The reports created from this research are very large and are better viewed on-line at the IR website.<sup>11</sup> Interested staff can print the parts they really care about. But here are a couple of excerpts from those reports just to give you an idea of the information contained.

Success Rates of Students by English Level									
	Passed 1A			ENGL-1A			ENGL-150		
	A-C or Credit	D or No Credit	Total Enrolled	A-C or Credit	D or No Credit	Total Enrolled	A-C or Credit	D or No Credit	Total Enrolled
ASTRO-10	239	64	303	285	161	446	214	261	475
	79%	21%		64%	36%		45%	55%	

Success Rates of Students by English Level									
	ENGL-350			READ-360			UNKNOWN		
	A-C or Credit	D or No Credit	Total Enrolled	A-C or Credit	D or No Credit	Total Enrolled	A-C or Credit	D or No Credit	Total Enrolled
ASTRO-10	14	58	72	2	12	14	130	96	446
	19%	81%		14%	86%		58%	46%	

Success Rates of Students by Math Level									
	Transfer-level			MATH-120			MATH-380		
	A-C or Credit	D or No Credit	Total Enrolled	A-C or Credit	D or No Credit	Total Enrolled	A-C or Credit	D or No Credit	Total Enrolled
ASTRO-10	289	72	361	184	95	279	150	161	311
	80%	20%		66%	34%		48%	52%	

<sup>11</sup> On the IR website for Published Reports, select Basic Skills and then look at reports under Course Success by English Level & Course Success by Math Level.

Success Rates of Students by Math Level									
MATH-376			MATH-372			UNKNOWN			
	A-C or Credit	D or No Credit	Total Enrolled	A-C or Credit	D or No Credit	Total Enrolled	A-C or Credit	D or No Credit	Total Enrolled
ASTRO-10	80	130	210	10	39	49	171	155	326
	38%	62%		20%	80%		52%	48%	

Based on these numbers it would appear that students need a minimum math level of Math-120 (meaning ready to take Math-120) and a minimum English level of Engl-1A (meaning ready to take Engl-1A) before they enroll in Astro-10 if they are to have a reasonable chance of passing the class.<sup>12</sup> When looking at these reports it is important to consider the enrollment numbers that the success rates are based on. The class shown above has pretty high enrollment numbers after we combined the many terms of data except for the numbers in the lowest math group and the lowest English group. The students that were in these groups did very poorly, however, and comparison to the next highest group gives more evidence that this was not just a fluke due to small sample size. But in another instance, such as the one shown below, it would *not* be a safe assumption that students at the Reading-360 level are likely to do as well in the class as those at much higher levels of English competency in spite of the 75% success rate of the 4 students at that level who took the class before. At this size sample the success rate doesn't mean much.

Success Rates of Students by English Level									
Passed 1A			ENGL-1A			ENGL-150			
	A-C or Credit	D or No Credit	Total Enrolled	A-C or Credit	D or No Credit	Total Enrolled	A-C or Credit	D or No Credit	Total Enrolled
HIST-8	242	48	290	153	66	219	92	61	153
	83%	17%		70%	30%		60%	40%	

Success Rates of Students by English Level									
ENGL-350			READ-360			UNKNOWN			
	A-C or Credit	D or No Credit	Total Enrolled	A-C or Credit	D or No Credit	Total Enrolled	A-C or Credit	D or No Credit	Total Enrolled
HIST-8	14	8	22	3	1	4	105	43	148
	64%	36%		75%	25%		71%	29%	

In another related research effort we created “cheat sheets” which also gave numbers for student success based on the level of English or of math. In this case we made separate reports for single levels of English and of math. We simply extracted all students who were taking a specific English or math class, and then examined their grades and success in all their other classes the same term. The reasoning was that all students *in* Engl-350 (for example) are at the Engl-350 “level”. Here is a sample of one of those reports, for Students in English-350.

<sup>12</sup> In other words, this is not a class to recommend to *any* basic skills student!

<b>Courses</b>	<b>Percent Passed</b>	<b>Total Enrolled</b>
PE-20 Baseball	100%	23
PE-51 Intercolleg. Basketball-Women	87%	15
PE-80 Athletic Conditioning	84%	56
PE-23 Fastpitch Softball	83%	12
PE-67 Theory of Football	83%	23
ART-2 Intro to Art	80%	44
PE-12A Beginning Weight Training	78%	36
PE-54 Intercollegiate Football	76%	29
PE-66 Concepts of Phys Fit & Exerc	75%	20
ART-31A Intro to Ceramics	73%	15
GUID-8 Career Planning	70%	10
HE-2 Crit Issues in Women's Health	70%	10
BT-111 Keyboarding I	69%	13
CIS-100 Basic Computer Skills	67%	284
HE-1 Health Education	67%	66
ART-17 Basic Drawing	64%	90
ART-10 Color & Design	64%	11
SPCH-7 Interpersonal Communication	64%	11
PSYCH-1 General Psychology	63%	30
SPCH-1 Public Speaking	62%	21
PSYCH-33 Personal Growth & Adjustment	61%	136

This Excel report file provides the option of filtering the data and in the above example we have used the filters to select only classes where students had a greater than 50% success rate, and where this was based on 10 or more students. The only problem we have is that most courses do not meet this selection criteria so the list that is left contains only 41 classes (not all shown in the sample) out of all the possible courses offered at CR. There are more “good results” courses in the lists for the higher levels of English. “Cheat sheets” for the levels of math are similar. The more classes that have meaningful numbers of students at any given level the more useful our “cheat sheets” will be. We should probably try this again with a larger set of data to see if we can increase those numbers. The advantage of this format is that it is simple to read and can be used by those who are advising students about the classes they should register for.

### IX. Comparison to ARCC Reports

Each year the Chancellor’s Office produces a report called *ARCC Report: College Level Indicators*.<sup>13</sup> This publication reports on a number of measures of student progress at

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<sup>13</sup> We will be referencing the ARCC 2008 report which covers data through the 2006-07 academic year, and the ARCC 2009 *DRAFT* report which covers data through 2007-08.

community colleges all over the state. Moreover, for each measure CR is compared to a “peer group” of other California Community Colleges that were judged to be “like” us in other measures that would have an effect on the main item under study. The raw data which the state has to work with consists of the MIS files which we and every other CC are mandated to send to the state on a regular basis. Several items on this report talk about basic skills. When looking at the ARCC Report measures it is very important to understand why those measures of basic skills do not agree with the numbers we are producing in our own studies conducted by Institutional Research.

The problem is that our MIS files are selecting different courses as “basic skills” than the list of courses IR was asked to research (see chart on page 1 of this document.) The MIS extracts look at the codes we have associated with our course-sections records and they count as “basic skills” every class with a course type of “B” for Basic Skills or “P” for Precollegiate Basic Skills. That list of courses does not agree very closely with the list of courses the Basic Skills Committee feels is a correct list of basic skills courses. Basic Skills *students*, in the MIS files, would be all students enrolled in any class marked by one of those two codes. Thus the ARCC Report, using the MIS data, is not looking at the same students as *we* are for basic skills measures. This not only affects the two specific measures of Basic Skills (*Table 1.4: Annual Successful Course Completion Rate for Credit Basic Skills Courses* and *Table 1.5: Improvement Rate for ESL and Credit Basic Skills Courses*), it also affects the Peer Group we were assigned to for the Student Progress and Achievement Rate. Peer Group assignment for those measures uses percent of basic skills in students in Fall 2005 as one of the criteria. It is quite possible that we are not assigned to the correct group.

Here is a list of the classes and the students enrolled for the Fall 2005 term that would have been reported in our MIS file for that term, if course type codes are the same now as they were in that year.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The numbers shown in subject and final totals are **distinct** counts of students.

**Course Enrollment for Basic Skills Classes - MIS Course Selection**

		<b>2005F</b>
English	ENGL-350	370
	ENGL-350L	380
	ENGL-353	9
	Total	382
General Studies	GS-360	119
	GS-361	85
	Total	123
Guidance	GUID-343	83
	GUID-345	292
	GUID-379	18
	GUID-380	30
	Total	372
Mathematics	MATH-371	22
	MATH-372	77
	MATH-375	43
	MATH-376	230
	Total	372
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,085</b>

Contrast those courses and numbers to the list below, which reports on the courses the CR BSI Committee asked us to research as Basic Skills.

**Course Enrollment for Basic Skills Classes – CR BSI Committee Course Selection**

		<b>2005F</b>
English	ENGL-150	439
	ENGL-350	370
	ENGL-353	9
	Total	818
General Studies	GS-150	206
	GS-360	119
	GS-361	85
	Total	329

Mathematics	MATH-105	110
	MATH-106	311
	MATH-371	22
	MATH-372	77
	MATH-375	43
	MATH-376	230
	Total	793
Total		1,599

The list of courses overlaps but it is not the same. CR has not been reporting ENGL-150 or MATH-105/106 (now MATH-380) to the state as basic skills classes, and we have high enrollments in those classes. At the same time, we *have* been reporting several Guidance classes as basic skills classes. In addition, the Guidance classes have about a 70% success rate overall, much better than the students do in the English and math classes, so it is likely that our success rate in “basic skills” looks better than it really is. ARCC 2008 gives CR a basic skills successful completion rate of 60.4%, and the 2009 draft report states our success rate is 59.1%.<sup>15</sup> But by our own measures basic skills success rates in the past two years are closer to 56.0% for 2006-07 and 56.2% for 2007-08. If our figures are correct then we have moved from being above-average compared to our Peer Group to being at or below average. Here is a quick comparison:

ARCC Indicator	College's Rate	Peer Group Average	Estimated <b>Correct</b> measure of this item
Annual Successful Course Completion Rate for Credit Basic Skills Courses: <b>2008 ARCC Report</b>	<b>60.4%</b> (but see footnote)	<b>57.8%</b>	<b>56.0%</b>
Annual Successful Course Completion Rate for Credit Basic Skills Courses: <b>2009 ARCC Report</b>	<b>59.1%</b>	<b>56.0%</b>	<b>56.2%</b>

Another place where both ARCC reports have rated CR as above average compared to a Peer Group is for the Student Progress and Achievement rate. Our placement into that peer group depends on an accurate count of basic skills students in Fall 2005. But comparing the student counts in the two charts, above, you can see that they differ by more than 500 students. We think it likely that if the counts were corrected CR would be placed into a different peer group for this measure, one where the percent of basic skills students is above the statewide average instead of below it. If we are assigned to the wrong peer group we cannot conclude anything about how we are doing compared to other community colleges.

This problem with how our data is extracted for MIS is just one part of several data problems we encountered in this year's research. This is discussed further in the next section.

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<sup>15</sup> The 2009 draft report also re-reports the previous year's figures and has changed the 60.4% to 64.0%; we have no idea why. Those figures are both for the 2006-07 academic year.

## X. Data Problems

The most critical data to get corrected in the Colleague Student database are the codes for course type that identify which of our courses are basic skills. This was just discussed at length in the previous section.

In order to discover if the students taking assessments are all the students who *should* be taking assessments we need to be able to tell who is enrolled with a goal of graduating with a certificate, graduating with a degree, or intending to transfer to a 4-year college. And we need some way to tell this for students who are still quite new at CR.

One data item we tried to use to make this determination is Educational Goal. Five of the educational goals are used by advisors at CR as indicators that assessment is *required*. Those Educational Goals are:

A	Transfer with AA/AS
B	Transfer without AA/AS
C	AA/AS without transfer
D	Vocational degree without transfer
E	Vocational cert without transfer

All students who apply to CR are required to select an educational goal when they fill out an application for admission. As they do not normally have any advisement at this stage they may select a goal that does not actually reflect what they hope to achieve by attending community college. There are 15 options to select from including some which are very general such as *J - Educational development* and *M - Undecided*. So this “naïve” goal, the one the student self-selected, is not a very good guide to which students are, in fact, seeking a degree or certificate or transfer.<sup>16</sup>

Another data item which ought to be useful for identifying the students who should take assessments is the program of study. The programs have codes, such as ECE.AS, which clearly place the student into a category that tells us if she is seeking a degree or certificate or transfer. But a large number of students are not enrolled in a program at the outset, although they must be in such a program by the time they graduate. However, as we are trying to identify the needs of students very early on, well before graduation if they ever get there, it would be helpful if the student’s program was entered into Colleague in their first term. For those who need time to explore college first before they decide on a goal, they could simply be placed into a generic program that can be changed later. The generic programs would need to indicate that a degree or transfer is likely, something like “AA or AS – undecided major.”

We may also assume that some students come to CR with high school work that places them into college-level math or English already, or with college work elsewhere, or even with college entrance exams such as the SAT or ACT that let us know where the student should be placed in math and English without taking additional assessment at CR. But from the IR perspective, how do we know this? Colleague has places to store this kind of data, but it does not appear that CR consistently uses that capacity. And when considering what data might be added or improved in

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<sup>16</sup> During advising, this “naïve” goal is supposed to be updated by the advisor as needed to be an accurate indicator of the student’s goal. The problem with this is if students don’t see an advisor this data correction never happens. And it may also be the case that very busy advisors have other priorities for their time so that we are not sure how consistently this data is being updated even for students who did meet with an advisor.

the Student database for research uses, it is critical to be consistent. Data that is gathered would ideally be the same for all students where it applies. For example, if transcript data is entered for students that transfer to CR after attending another college, then it should be complete, and should be entered for *all* transfer students. Otherwise it is useless data in terms of gathering statistics from the data. This is just one example.

Another problem for researchers is the issue of “Special Admit” students. This category of students consists of all students who are really still enrolled in K-12 although they are occupying seats in classes at CR. We have always had some such students. With the growing popularity of home-schooling and the addition of the Academy of the Redwoods for high school students, the numbers of such students at CR are larger now than ever. Methodology used for the ARCC Reports, and methodology suggested for Basic Skills research by the authors of *Basic Skills as a Foundation for Student Success in California Community Colleges* clearly tell us to exclude Special Admit students from the data. Our problem is that the database field that stores this value in Colleague is only correct for the *current* term. This means there is no reliable way to determine if students in earlier terms were special-admit students at the time. Here is an example: Jane Smith comes to CR at the age of 16 and is a special admit student in 2007F and 2008S. Her database record is coded with “SPA” to indicate her status. She graduates from high school and is readmitted to CR as a “regular” student in Fall 2008. If Student Services processes everything correctly her status is now changed to “New” student and the SPA code is deleted. If they do not process everything correctly she remains identified as a special-admit student even though she is not. When we want to produce a report that excludes all special-admit students we need to be assured the students are correctly identified. If we wish to compare the measure for a current term to old terms we need to also exclude the special-admit students in *that* term in order to have a fair comparison. Since we no longer know who they were we cannot do this. Therefore we have found it “cleaner” to simply leave them in the data. But this means our data are not really correct.<sup>17</sup> We need a historical student status field that lets us go back in time to identify special groups of students that should be included or excluded for reporting.

Another odd lack in the Student database is an accurate field for students’ first term. There is a “first-term” data item, but when compared to students’ enrollment it can easily be seen that the value in that field is seldom correct. And in some student records this value is blank. Many questions submitted to the Basic Skills researcher requested reporting only on “new” students in a given term or academic year. Since there is no data item giving the student’s status “as of” a previous term and there is no reliable data giving first term of enrollment it is unnecessarily difficult to identify the new students for any particular term.

The virtual fields which calculate the students’ placement levels in math and English are great, but they don’t completely meet the need for knowing what the students’ levels of math and English are later on, after they begin taking classes in math and English. In other words, a student who placed at the level of “Engl 350/353” may have taken enough English since to currently be enrolled in Engl-1A. The placement level is no longer useful to us. It might be worth considering asking ITS to develop another set of virtual fields which calculate *Current* English Level and *Current* Math Level, or even English and math level as of a specific enrollment term. These fields would look at the English and math classes already passed, defaulting to the assessed level where no classes had been taken. Besides their usefulness to basic skills research, such fields could be helpful on an inquiry screen as a way to see, easily, the

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<sup>17</sup> 5.5% of all students in Spring 2009 were special-admit students.

English “level” or math “level” of students enrolled in a specific class, or might even be used in advance of registration to steer students towards classes they are likely to do well in without needing to evaluate that student’s previous course work on a one-by-one basis.

## XI. Conclusion

All research seems to have one thing in common: for every question answered more questions are generated. This is certainly true of our Basic Skills research to date. We have learned that the majority of our students need some basic skills work. We have learned that some of our data really needs improvement; we can’t trust any numbers generated from faulty data. Our main goals going forward should be to:

- a) Resolve differences between our in-house research and MIS reporting and ARCC research.
- b) Correct data in the Student database, add data that is currently not available and improve procedures that make data more accurate.
- c) Try to formulate and research questions that will lead us to ideas about *changes* we can make at CR that will better serve the basic skills students.
- d) Keep track of the affect of those changes through continued research on student outcomes.