A Seat at the Table

BY LESLIE HENSON AND KATIE HERN

Supporting Student and Teacher Capacity in Corequisite English Remediation and Accelerated ESL

The California Acceleration Project

The California Acceleration Project (CAP) was founded in 2010 by two community college teachers who wanted to do something about the poor outcomes of students placed into remediation. CAP is a faculty-led professional development network that supports the state's 114 community colleges with the goal of transforming remediation to increase college completion and equity. CAP colleges implement reforms that increase student completion of transferable, college-level English and math requirements, a critical milestone on the path to degrees and transfer. These reforms include using high school grades in placement, tailoring math remediation to a student's chosen program of study, replacing traditional remedial courses with corequisite support models, and teaching with high challenge, high support pedagogy.

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Preface

A new law in California—Assembly Bill 705—is requiring colleges to completely reimagine their approach to incoming students. Instead of placing 80 percent of students into stand-alone remedial courses,[i] by Fall 2019 community colleges will need to allow almost all students to enroll directly in transferable, college-level English composition, with concurrent support for those who need it. In English as a Second Language (ESL) programs, colleges will need to ensure that students have the best chance of completing college composition within three years.[ii]

Some faculty are anxious about AB 705. They wonder whether students will be successful going directly into college English when they traditionally have taken two, three, or more semesters of remediation, and even more if they started in ESL. They worry that students will struggle and fail, that students' language development will be compromised, or that teachers will lower their standards.

But at colleges already making the changes required by AB 705, faculty are seeing that many more students can succeed in college English than previously assumed.

Our report, *A Seat at the Table*, focuses on three colleges where corequisite remediation and accelerated ESL instruction are producing substantial gains in completion and equity. Sacramento City College and San Diego Mesa College were among the first to begin replacing developmental English courses with corequisite support models, and Solano College has one of the most accelerated ESL programs in the state. Their experience sheds light on the classroom practices, professional development, and faculty mindsets that are helping to make these programs successful.

This publication is intended for classroom faculty grappling with AB 705 and especially with how to support a more heterogeneous group of students in college composition and streamlined ESL pathways. Working on *A Seat at the Table* this spring, I noticed immediate changes in my own teaching. I began looking at ESL students' writing in a new way. I dialed up the volume on expressing validation. I scrapped an essay assignment and replaced it with a more culturally affirmative one that gave students more creative elbow room. I sat down with a student in the computer lab, gave her a bit of guidance, and said, "Can you write that, and I'll be back in five minutes?" When students missed class or assignments, I reached out, and I reached out again.

What I love most about the following articles is that they help me to envision, very concretely, what I can do to ensure that my students have a seat at the table. I hope it will do the same for other faculty.

With hope for the future,

Katie Hern
Co-founder and executive director, California Acceleration Project

Sacramento City College: Focused on Student Capacity

At Sacramento City College, corequisite English teachers are stepping up to support their students inside and outside the classroom. Whether it's reaching out when students miss class, helping a student parent find the right person to handle an issue their child is facing at the local high school, or letting students do extra schoolwork to make up absences, faculty are finding new ways to assist students who might not otherwise succeed.

Many teachers might feel reticent about engaging with students this way, but Sac City English teachers Jesús Limón Guzmán, Dawna DeMartini, and Carrie Marks say that these practices can mean the difference between a capable student passing or withdrawing from class.

Sac City's corequisite model was first offered in Fall 2015 as a pilot in the college's Umoja-SBA learning community, which is focused on African culture and history. It then expanded into the college's general population. Similar to the Accelerated Learning Program at the Community College of Baltimore County, the model takes 20 students who are classified as "underprepared" and allows them to enroll directly in special sections of college English, along with eight students classified as "college-ready." The 20 students also take a linked three-unit support course taught by the same instructor.

All corequisite models show large gains in completion, when compared to traditional remediation, because they eliminate opportunities for students to be lost to attrition. But Sac City's corequisite results have been especially strong. Of the 333 students who took corequisite English in 2017, 80 percent succeeded, with comparable pass rates for all racial/ethnic groups.[iii]

A Capacity Focus

Marks, who taught the first section of the corequisite course, says the model is based on the belief that even students with very little academic writing experience can become college writers. However, she points out that recognizing student capacity isn't always easy, particularly at the beginning of the semester. She says she still experiences seeing the results of her students' first assignment and thinking, "This is it. This is the group I won't be able to get there."

Limón Guzmán notes that faculty can sometimes fall into the trap of thinking that students should arrive already having the exit skills of the course. "We have to reflect, 'Oh, no. Wait. It's actually my job to help them to move along to get to that point.'" After learning this lesson from Marks, Limón Guzmán says he's been able to remind her during her moments of doubt: "You have to let them grow."

Recognizing students' capacity can be particularly difficult for white teachers working with students of color because of learned implicit bias, says DeMartini. Many of the corequisite teachers have sought out training in equity-mindedness and regularly add articles and texts to their own "anti-bias reading lists."[1]

DeMartini, Marks, and Limón Guzmán say that this work has helped them unlearn their assumptions about what student engagement looks like. Now, they say, they no longer assume that a student sitting in the back of the room, not participating or turning in work, doesn't care about the class and thus doesn't deserve extra effort by the instructor. Instead, the three faculty members understand that these behaviors can be signs of apprehension or reactions to previous school experiences, and they work harder to establish positive relationships with these students.

Overall, the teachers agree that recognizing student capacity means noticing when it appears and creating opportunities to showcase it in class. Early in the semester, they ask students to bring in something they're proud to have written. Students have shared poems, songs, text messages, comic books, eulogies, and school essays. The instructors also use examples of successful student writing as models throughout the semester, and they supplement traditional essay assignments with more personal writing projects that reflect students' aspirations and creativity.

Limón Guzmán does an activity at the beginning of the semester called the "Blue Sky Scenario," in which students write about a typical day in their future, 10 years from now, if they've succeeded in achieving all their goals. One student's response revealed that he was a skilled cook, and Limón Guzmán was later able to connect those culinary strengths to the research process, saying to the student, "We're in the middle of making the meal now; don't expect the kitchen to be neat and clean yet."

[1.] Current favorites include Racism without Racists by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva; Stamped from the Beginning by Ibram Kendi; and For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood... and the Rest of Y'All Too: Reality Pedagogy and Urban Education by Chris Emdin.

DeMartini and Marks have begun to experiment with intentionally grouping students so they can share complementary strengths. For example, a quiet student who is organized and good with technology might be paired with two students who are more verbal and outgoing, but less adept with technology.

To build a bridge to academic writing, Sac City teachers draw upon the language that students use in their everyday lives. In one of Marks' assignments, students create an imagined dialogue between author Ta-Nehisi Coates and economist Milton Friedman. They write dialogue in the form of a scene from a play or as a text message. In one student's dialogue, Friedman calls Coates "whack" for thinking that the job of the rich is to help the poor, to which Coates responds, "The rich piggyback off the hard work of the poor, especially Black people." Not convinced by this, Friedman responds, "If people have the drive and potential, they gonna get stacks on stacks!"

Ultimately, a focus on student capacity goes beyond teaching techniques. "Strategies will only get you so far," says Marks. "What you genuinely believe about students is what you will communicate to them."

Affirmative Feedback and Assignment Sequencing

When students struggle with academic writing, the Sac City teachers say affirmative feedback is key to ensuring that they stick it out. DeMartini shares that she asked students to write a 1,000-word essay critiquing C.S. Lewis' argument that people do not have a right to happiness. When a student turned in two paragraphs instead of a complete essay, DeMartini responded affirmatively: "I know you struggled with this assignment, but there are some great ideas woven in here, particularly when you question Lewis' ideas about Natural Law. The main issue is the structure—there are only two paragraphs! What happened to intro, body paragraphs, and conclusion?—and also the development of ideas. You convey Lewis' ideas well, but there isn't enough of your own voice—your own experience/examples. I loved what you said in our class discussion about sacrificing personal happiness. Working that into your revision will strengthen your essay. Let's go over this together and make a revision plan!"

The comment doesn't let incomplete work slide, yet points out what the student is doing well and the instructor's belief in the student's ability to do better. The student who received the comment sat down to write an outline with the instructor, went on to receive a passing grade for the assignment and in the course, and graduated in May 2018.

The Sac City teachers say that careful sequencing of assignments is also key, since the goal is for students to work toward increasing independence in their learning. For example, both DeMartini and Limón Guzmán have students collaborate on "quotation banks," compiling quotes from class readings in a shared Google Doc or making posters during class so that everyone can use the selected quotes in their synthesis essays. This process sets them up to integrate sources more independently in later research papers.

If students in the class have no experience with academic writing, says Limón Guzmán, he will walk it back even further. To teach them how to construct paragraphs for a research paper, he gives students several short texts on a common issue, and they then work in groups to find meaningful quotations, one text at a time. Then, the class works together to analyze patterns in the quotations and to construct topic sentences for paragraphs.

Limón Guzmán says the process shows students how writers really work. "Writers don't usually start off with their thesis and topic sentences clearly formed in their minds," he says. Instead, they answer questions by discovering evidence and patterns in the texts and synthesizing those in their writing.

> "Strategies will only get you so far. What you genuinely believe about students is what you will communicate to them"

DeMartini schedules class time in a computer lab to give students the chance for real-time feedback on their writing. Students who are on track can just work on their assignments, giving her time to focus on those who need more guidance. "You can check in while they're writing," she says. She might tell a student, "Hey, I love what you're doing here! But this part needs a topic sentence. Can you write that, and I'll be back in five minutes?" She says that this kind of just-in-time feedback as students are composing is the best way to reach the ones who have never been taught academic writing, "from how to indent a paragraph and other basics to 'Let's get a more sophisticated thesis going here.'"

The teachers say that by the end of the semester, they find that the quality of the corequisite students' work is as high as the writing for any transfer-level class they have taught, and they say the corequisite students often end up earning the highest grades.

Relationships and Reaching Out

Sac City teachers say they intentionally make space for students to create positive relationships with their professors and peers, such as through informal writing assignments in which students reflect on their experiences in class. "There's always lots of nodding when students share that they struggled with the reading or had an issue with procrastination," DeMartini says.

Many of the Sac City teachers also have what they call "Kumbaya Day," a check-in circle held in the middle of the semester for students to talk about what's going on in their lives and how they're doing in their classes. The teachers say that students often end up connecting each other to resources—tips on jobs, or resources for homeless students—that were not familiar to the teachers.

> Some teachers would say, Oh, it looks like this isn't a good semester for you, come back later when you're ready. But we know that doesn't work. Whose life ever gets settled?

DeMartini notes that, as a white teacher, she is especially intentional about earning the trust of students of color, since these students "have valid reasons not to trust white educators." One of the ways she does this is by speaking up if racial misconceptions surface. If a white student says, "Oh, but slavery was so long ago! It's equal now, and you just have to work hard," DeMartini will pause and point out society's ongoing discrimination in a way that doesn't shame the white student. What's important, she says, is to handle these moments in a way that affirms that students of color and their experiences belong in the classroom community.

Whenever possible, the teachers design the coursework so that students can collaborate and become, in DeMartini's words, "a true knowledge-building community." She'll often, divide up homework tasks or readings among the students. She says students take it seriously when they feel their classmates are relying on them to summarize part of an article or to research a topic. "They don't want to let their classmates down," she adds.

In addition to building community in the classroom, the teachers build community with each other through monthly meetings where they share their materials, troubleshoot problems, and get feedback on their practices. At one meeting, each participant shared an activity that had failed, and the teachers discussed possible reasons for the failure. At least once a term, they also look at student work and collaborate on how to respond to it affirmatively. Sac City also has an innovative program that allows each faculty member to spend five hours a week mentoring students in another instructor's class. Funded through a grant from the state Basic Skills and Student Outcomes Transformation Program, the mentoring program allows faculty to learn from each other before teaching the corequisite course for the first time.

Limón Guzmán, DeMartini, and Marks have all taught the corequisite model and served as mentors to students in other teachers' sections. They note that the mentoring program allows students to have a relationship with someone who is there solely to provide support, without the power dynamics that students can feel when they approach their classroom instructors for help. The mentors and teachers also work together on strategies to get through to struggling students, such as calling or texting those with absences and overdue work.

One semester, a student named Juan was showing signs of disengagement in DeMartini's course by not coming to class or by sitting in the back. As the class mentor, Marks called Juan and learned that he was going through a court custody battle that was making it difficult for him to focus on school. She invited him to her office hours and let him use her computer to begin his assignments. This strategy helped him regain focus and successfully complete the class.

DeMartini says the point is to help students with what they need in order to do their best work, not pronouncing, "Well, the attendance policy is three absences, so you're out."

"Some teachers would say, 'Oh, it looks like this isn't a good semester for you. Come back later when you're ready,'" she says. "But we know that doesn't work. Whose life ever gets settled?"

Sajad Alani struggled with English after arriving in the U.S. from Jordan at age 15, but by the time she got to San Diego Mesa College, she felt confident enough to follow her counselor's advice to enroll in transfer English with corequisite support. "This class helped me improve my English, academic writing, and research," says Alani. She finished with a 95 percent in the class and hopes to transfer to UCLA next spring to study architecture and engineering.

Looking Ahead

In Fall 2018, all four colleges in the Los Rios Community College District will be offering corequisite English, and the district is gearing up for the following fall, when corequisite English will become the primary means of supporting underprepared students.

The Sac City teachers know that beyond the corequisite structure, faculty will need to adjust their teaching practices and policies, along with their beliefs about and relationships with students. "Equity doesn't happen automatically," says Marks. "Changing the structure of our course sequence will lead to decreases in disproportionate outcomes, but the gap won't be eliminated unless we are also reflective about our practices."

To that end, Marks, DeMartini, and the corequisite coordinators from each of the other Los Rios campuses are organizing district-wide trainings twice each semester on topics such as community-building techniques and anti-racist writing assessment.

At the first district training in Spring 2018, 90 teachers explored corequisite data and design principles, brainstormed about culturally affirmative texts and resources, and practiced how to provide supportive feedback about beginning-of-the-semester essays. A panel of students also shared how the corequisite English course helped them succeed in subsequent classes.

Going forward, each college will have its own monthly community of practice meeting; the Sac City teachers will break into smaller communities of practice led by experienced corequisite instructors. There is also a district-wide course offered through Canvas—the cloud-based learning management system used by the district—with resources and discussion boards for faculty.

When asked if she thinks the scale-up will go smoothly, Marks says she's confident that people will feel well-prepared and supported to begin teaching corequisite English. "Everyone is focused on what this will do for our students," Marks says. "It's all been so positive."

Solano College: A Seat at the Table for ESL Students

In 2011, Solano College was one of the first community colleges in the state to pilot an accelerated developmental English course with the California Acceleration Project. This enabled students to take just one class before college English instead of up to three. As one of the first faculty to teach the course, Melissa Reeve saw firsthand how much better students did when they had a faster route through college English. She also saw that, with the right support, students could handle much more challenge than they'd traditionally been given.

The experience made Reeve reflect on the college's English as a Second Language program, where she also teaches. She was troubled by how few students transitioned from ESL coursework into transferable college English. In 2012, just 9 percent of students who started in ESL went on to complete college English, taking an average time of over two years to do so (26 months; n=80).[iv]

Reeve was also troubled by the program's focus on decontextualized skills. Each level included three separate ESL courses—reading, grammar, and listening/speaking or writing. She believed this structure was not only pedagogically ineffective, but also flawed for introducing more "exit points," making it more likely that students would disappear to attrition. A student starting at the lowest ESL level could take as many as 28 units of ESL coursework, plus eight units of developmental English, before enrolling in college English.

As the English department expanded its accelerated offerings, Reeve and her colleagues began redesigning the ESL sequence. Solano now offers a six-unit integrated skills class (reading, writing, and grammar) at each of its three levels. At the end of the highest-level class, faculty assess a portfolio of each student's work and refer students to the English course that is most appropriate for their level of fluency—college English, college English with corequisite support, or a developmental course one level below college English.

Solano's ESL program is one of the most accelerated in the state, taking students in just three semesters from "false beginner" proficiency—that is, having some English vocabulary and use of present tense verbs—into mainstream English classes. Most incoming students begin in the intermediate or advanced class, but even those who begin at the lowest level can complete their ESL classes and college English within two years. With Solano's curricular redesign in English and ESL, ESL students are now completing transfer-level English at higher rates and in shorter amounts of time. By Fall 2015, the first semester of integrated skills at all levels of the ESL program, 27 percent of students who started in ESL completed transfer English in an average time of under a year and a half (16 months; n=82), a completion rate three times higher than in 2012.[v]

We Did a Good Job Out of It: The Principle of "Good Enough" English

Reeve and fellow teacher José Cortés say they feel fortunate to teach in both the ESL program and the English department at Solano, and they emphasize that open communication between the two units is critical. Reeve points out that English department faculty usually lack specific training in language development and can feel uncertain about how to work with ESL students, so they may react by wanting to keep ESL students out of transfer-level English. ESL faculty sense their English department colleagues' discomfort and want to keep ESL students with teachers who have the training to address their needs. And, says Reeve, teachers from both sides often fear that accelerating ESL students will deprive them of the time they need for language acquisition.

While acknowledging the good intentions behind these concerns, Reeve and Cortés argue that students don't need level upon level of discrete skills-based courses before they're ready for college English. Further, they say that long ESL sequences are based on unrealistic and discriminatory ideas about language development. As Reeve puts it, "There is this idea that, with enough time, ESL students can speak and write like native speakers," with no accents or traces of their heritage languages in their writing. She points out that this is an "exceedingly rare" outcome for adult language learners and that "completely eradicating traces of students' heritage from their English shouldn't be the goal, even if it were possible."

Cortés says that even his own father, a Spanish speaker who has been using English for almost 40 years, still does not sound like a native English speaker. If Cortés is working on a project with his father in the backyard, when they are finished, his father will say, in English, "We did a good job out of it," applying a direct translation from Spanish that does not have the same effect in English. "There are certain things in the way he talks that make him who he is," says Cortés. "The way you use language represents everything you are and shouldn't be a source of shame."

Despite the fact that English is an increasingly global language, Reeve notes that it wasn't until five years ago that the Solano ESL program and English department agreed that students could exhibit markers of non-native English and still pass the exam that is required to move on to transfer English. Says Cortés, "We were just seeing too many students who could meet all of the other outcomes, but who were barred from advancing because of their non-native English markers."

Cortés and Reeve have come to see the requirement for native-like proficiency as deeply problematic. But Reeve emphasizes that openness to a wider variety of English usage doesn't mean "anything goes," saying, "People just can't say anything in any order." However, Reeve adds that a U.S. English accent and verb tenses "aren't measures of how much students know about a given subject."

She points out the many people who complete undergraduate degrees in other countries and then enter high-paying U.S. jobs and graduate schools with non-native English. "So why is it the case that they can do all of these things, and their English is considered good enough," Reeve asks, "but community colleges say that sort of English is not good enough to get through an entry-level English class in the U.S.?"

Reeve holds workshops for ESL and English teachers in which she asks them to record their ideas about what constitutes "good enough" English. She reports that college English teachers say a student's English is "good enough" to take a college-level course when they can read and understand and respond in meaningful ways to complex readings. Notably, college English teachers don't define college readiness in terms of students' ability to sound like native speakers.

Taking the focus off of unrealistic language expectations allows Reeve and Cortés to concentrate their energy on helping ESL students make the same moves the two teachers require of all students. "If they can read college-level texts on current issues and write thesis-driven essays marshaling evidence from texts that they've read, that's readiness," notes Reeve. "We routinely see students who can do these things while their English still shows traces of their heritage languages."

Just Because I'm Stupid in English Doesn't Mean I'm Stupid in Everything Else

Cortés and Reeve say that they are able to help ESL students achieve these higher-order outcomes because of their respect for students' capacities. "The great frustration of being an adult English learner," says Reeve, "is that it's impossible to show the full range of your intellect with the language you have available to you." Cortés quotes the essay "Being a Teenager is Hard Enough Without Having to Learn English as a Second Language," in which the narrator snaps, "Just because I'm stupid in English doesn't mean I'm stupid in everything else."[vi]

An accelerated approach to ESL acknowledges that students know more and have more thoughts than they can show right away. The goal, says Reeve, is to bring students "to a place where they can make the full range of their intellect available in their writing."

To facilitate this goal, the Solano teachers are using fewer skill and drill textbooks and more challenging general interest readings. Traditional ESL textbooks, they argue, are written for an international audience of all ages and can oversimplify things for adults who are already knowledgeable, mature people. Cortés and Reeve advocate selecting readings and assignments that students can connect to their personal experiences—for example, readings about identity and culture, or about non-dominant languages and the prejudices against them.

This kind of curriculum can help ESL students succeed by creating opportunities for them to experience themselves as experts. Reeve notes that when she gets her students—from recent high school graduates to those with advanced degrees and professions—to talk in class about various subjects, she finds out how much each of them knows. Says Reeve, "Put together the collective wealth of their knowledge, and they're able to support each other to gain more knowledge."

As an example, Reeve discusses a class in which students were examining readings about the economic impact of illegal immigration. The articles were heavily steeped in economics, but two ESL students had that background and explained the formulas to members of their discussion groups, going deep into the math. They may have been inexperienced with academic English, but their expertise shone through, thanks to the relevant, challenging curriculum in the course.

Bored in high school, Maslin Walker graduated with a low GPA and was originally placed two levels below college English at Sacramento City College. In Fall 2015, he enrolled instead in transfer-level English with corequisite support. His success in this course motivated him to move on to honors courses, and he was recently admitted for transfer to UC Santa Cruz and UC Riverside.

Likewise, in Cortés' accelerated English course, the topic was high stakes testing, and the students from China and Vietnam made valuable contributions to the class because, in their countries, tests determine if you'll even go to college. Reeve says, "People are able to bring to bear life experience and education from other systems, which lets them thrive when the focus is on reading, writing, and critical thinking."

A Seat at the Table

In addition to finding topics and assignments that provide ESL students with a chance to show their expertise, Reeve and Cortés say that teachers need to pay special attention to building ESL students' knowledge of American culture through "just-in-time schemata" that fill in just enough background information to help students understand readings.

In Spring 2018, free speech versus hate speech was the topic for the English department's common final, taken by students in developmental English and advanced ESL. To prepare, Cortés and Reeve helped students understand American cultural references in the readings, including references to the KKK, First Amendment, Me Too movement, and Black Lives Matter. Reeve says the ESL students' writing "was phenomenal, because some students wrote about their experiences in revolutions and the histories of their own countries with free speech." That experience enabled some ESL students to "engage the topic even more richly than some of the U.S.-born students."

In her transfer-level English course, Reeve has used the text The New Jim Crow by civil rights lawyer and legal scholar Michelle Alexander. Initially, she worried that the ESL students wouldn't be able to follow the complex American cultural and historical references, but she says it ended up being "the biggest challenge, and the thing they were proudest of." Reeve believes that part of the job of English and ESL teachers is to equip students with this kind of knowledge and to give them, in her words, "a seat at the table."

After seeing so many ESL learners succeed using this high-challenge, high-support approach, Cortés and Reeve truly believe in accelerating multilingual students. The two say they continually find themselves pointing out what students are doing well with their writing and celebrating students' achievements in other areas. "Seeing the things they're capable of doing, I'm constantly floored by their determination," says Cortés. He recalls seeing one of his ESL students in the tutoring center, participating in study groups for anatomy and physiology. "Those are hard classes, even when you know the language," he says. "Yet, they're doing it."

Next Steps

Solano's ESL program is ahead of many colleges in getting ready for AB 705 implementation. Under the new law, credit ESL sequences must enable students to complete college English within three years.[vii] With most credit ESL students able to complete college English in two years, Solano's curricular structure fits within these parameters. Further, the college has offered special sections of the corequisite model of college composition that are targeted to multilingual learners—a concurrent support model that other colleges are likely to develop as part of their response to AB 705.

But Solano still relies largely upon a standardized test (Accuplacer) to place students into ESL coursework. The next year or two will include consideration of how to better integrate multiple measures of student capacity, along with how to meet AB 705's requirement that students' placement must give them the best possible chance of completing transfer-level English.[viii]

In 2018-19, Reeve and Cortés will also be serving as coaches for the California Acceleration Project, helping faculty from across the state reimagine their course sequences and pedagogy to increase completion and to give ESL students a seat at the table.

Says Reeve, "We need to advocate for ESL students, recognize their capacities, and take responsibility for their needs. "

San Diego Mesa College: Supporting Faculty to Teach in New Models

College English with Corequisite Support

In Fall 2016, San Diego Mesa College launched an alternative to traditional remediation. Instead of requiring students to take one or two semesters of developmental English classes, the college let students enroll directly in transfer-level English composition, along with an attached two-unit support course taught by the same instructor.

Figure 1: Completion of College English Composition at San Diego Mesa College
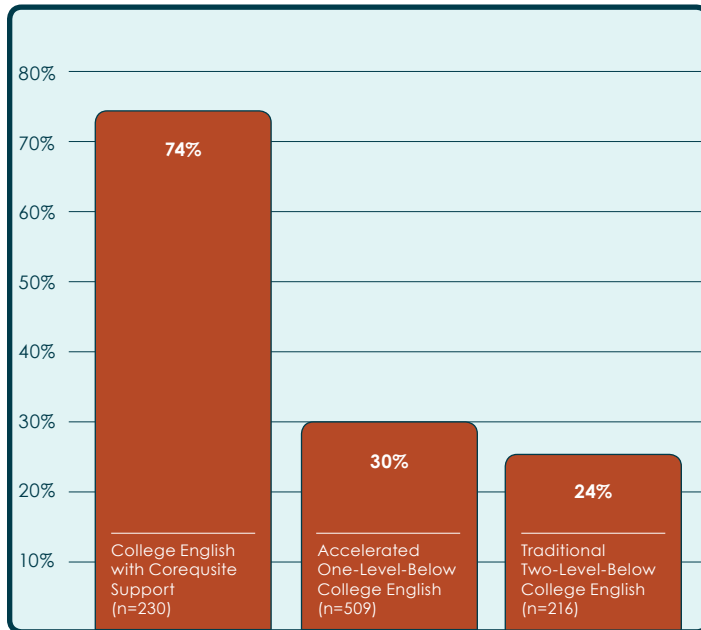
Corequisite students were tracked for one semester (Fall 2016, Spring 2017). Accelerated students were tracked for one year (Fall 2015-Spring 2016). Traditional two-levels-below students were tracked two years (Fall 2012-Spring 2014).

In 2016-2017, 74 percent of Mesa's corequisite students passed transfer-level English in one semester (Figure 1). This is more than double the rate of students who started in Mesa's accelerated developmental course and almost double the statewide average for one-year completion of transfer-level English (38%). Among African American corequisite students, one-year completion of transfer-level English was three times the state average (81% vs. 27%), and completion among Latinx corequisite students was almost double the state average (65% vs. 36%).[ix]

But the structural change brought with it a challenge for teachers. In the past, students who got into college English were a highly filtered population that included the small percentage who had tested into the course and those who had successfully navigated the developmental sequence. By contrast, in Fall 2017, 93 percent of incoming students were eligible to enroll directly in the corequisite college-level course with no prerequisites.

The college recognized that faculty would need support to teach this more heterogeneous population, so with funding from the state Basic Skills and Student Outcomes Transformation Program grant, they created a new faculty development program known as Acceleration Innovators at Mesa (AIM). Modeled in part on the California Acceleration Project's statewide community of practice, this optional yearlong program supports faculty who teach corequisite and accelerated developmental courses. It is led by two faculty coordinators who receive a 20 percent reduction in their teaching duties; participants are paid for half a unit of load each semester.

Improving Teachers' Practice through Collaborative Feedback

English teacher Jason Kalchik had been out of graduate school for eight years when he first started teaching developmental English at Mesa. His last experience in a classroom was as a student sitting in a circle talking about William Faulkner, so that's what he tried with his own students. "I had 30 people sitting in a giant circle, and nobody would talk," he says. It made him realize that the way he had learned wasn't necessarily the way his students would learn.

Today, Kalchik and his colleague Marie Alfonsi co-coordinate AIM. Just as corequisite models are based on a belief in student capacity, Kalchik and Alfonsi say that AIM's founding philosophy is a belief in faculty capacity—particularly the capacity to support students' learning.

Among African American corequisite students, one-year completion of transfer-level English was three times the state average (81% vs. 27%), and completion among Latinx corequisite students was almost double the state average (65% vs. 36%).

The AIM community meets once a month for workshops on pedagogy, with a particular emphasis on closing equity gaps. The AIM workshops do not give teachers one-size-fits-all solutions. Instead, teachers are encouraged to share resources and to reflect on their practices, try new approaches, and demonstrate a growth mindset toward their students. At each workshop, participants share what they're doing in the classroom and receive feedback.

The community of practice starts with the principle that intentional support for students' emotional needs should be part of every aspect of instruction, including choices of texts, classroom activities, the language used in handouts, and grading policies. Teachers work together to brainstorm how to provide this support, keeping in mind that many community college students, especially students of color, have had negative experiences with education.

Kalchik says that AIM workshops strive to help teachers balance the intellectual and emotional needs of their students, an effort he says "can feel like spinning plates."

The workshops motivated teacher Sim Barhoum to introduce daily mindfulness exercises to his classes, drawing upon his own meditation practice as a way to support students' affective needs. The workshops also prompted him to include more complex readings in class and to help students access them through activities like group think-alouds and interpreting texts from different perspectives.

Participating in AIM helped teacher Kim Lacher see her own assignments from a student's perspective. "There was a lot of 'You must do this,' and, 'In paragraph one you will do this,'" says Lacher. "Students didn't have a lot of room for freedom or creativity."

> Rigid policies on absences and late work are designed for people who don't have any problems.

Lacher says she had always taught rhetoric using the traditional, Aristotelian terms of ethos, pathos, and logos, which students used to analyze a book chapter or a short article. "Some students really struggled to use these terms in a way that made for complex analysis," says Lacher. "They could see the moves and had insightful observations, but they would mix up the terms."

Based on feedback from her AIM colleagues, Lacher began giving more freedom in her assignments. She allowed students to analyze songs instead of only

books or articles and to use more familiar terms—like authority, passion, and ideas—in place of the Aristotelian ones. "Students can identify with music better than they can relate to a lot of other texts," she says, "and they can create complex arguments and beautiful analyses because they know so much about it." One student produced an incisive analysis of Beyoncé's 2016 song "Formation." "Once she was free to talk about it in her own way," says Lacher, "her writing and her analysis were stronger."

In his own classroom, Kalchik is focusing on establishing a sense of belonging for men of color. He includes texts that open up conversations about the notion of educational environments as feminine. In addition to giving them practice with active reading, analysis, and responding with evidence, this curricular choice encourages students to start seeing themselves as scholars. Along with Alfonsi, Kalchik is also exploring J. Luke Wood's concept of culturally affirmative texts; that is, texts that show people of color in academic and professional roles and positions of power, rather than exclusively through social justice themes such as slavery, criminal justice, and civil rights.[x]

At the end of the year, AIM participants work in groups of two or three to create instructional materials for a curricular unit of corequisite English. They present the materials to the group for feedback, then house them on AIM's online toolbox as a resource that current and future teachers can use in their classes.

Contract Grading: One AIM Participant's Experiment

For her final project, teacher Ranmali Rodrigo decided to completely overhaul her grading policies. Inspired by AIM workshops led by anti-racist writing assessment advocate Asao Inoue, she began using contract grading in her classes.[xi]

Rodrigo's students now receive full credit if they meet 80 percent of the requirements for quality work (including organization, voice, and minimal errors). With contract grading, Rodrigo says she is forced to look for what students have done right and to give credit accordingly, regardless of components of their work that might not conform to academic conventions that she hasn't yet covered in class.

Rodrigo says the 80 percent rule means that "sometimes it doesn't look like good writing at the beginning of the term." In the past, she says, if students had grammar problems that made their writing unclear, she might have assigned low grades. Now, she provides links to online lessons from Grammar Girl or the Purdue Online Writing Lab and allows time for students' skills to develop over the semester.

The system has been especially beneficial for students whose first language is not English. Rodrigo recalls a student telling her, "I'm a nurse in my country, and my teachers here talk to me as if I'm stupid." In traditional grading, teachers often use a comparative system based on the best paper all the way down to the worst paper. Contract grading, in contrast, assesses students against the requirements of the assignment, not in comparison to the work of native speakers. "It doesn't punish them for being in this moment, learning how to use English in this context, for this specific purpose," Rodrigo says.

Another change Rodrigo has made is allowing students to make up work or to complete additional work to erase a late assignment. She explains that rigid policies on absences and late work are designed for "people who don't have any problems." Students who need to miss class can use a "plea" once in the semester to erase up to a week's worth of absences caused by circumstances outside their control. The approach allows her to "meet students where they are, instead of punishing them for the things that are happening in their lives."

During her first semester of contract grading, there were moments when Rodrigo says she wanted to "run back" to her old system, but support from the AIM community helped her feel safe enough to keep trying.

Next Steps

With a successful corequisite model already in place, Mesa is more prepared for AB 705 than many colleges. However, teachers Wendy Smith and Jennifer Cost stress that they developed and championed the model well before the law was enacted. "It was an effort to do what's best for students, not a response to a legislative mandate," says Smith.

Associate Dean of Research and Planning Bridget Herrin says this same spirt has driven Mesa to keep tightening its placement process "so that students don't fall through the cracks." Under the college's newest placement model, 100 percent of students, including those who have been out of high school for more than 10 years, are eligible for transfer English or transfer English with corequisite support. And after September 30, 2018, the college will no longer be using Accuplacer—or any standardized test—to place students in English.

Currently, students who place below transfer English are directed to choose between the corequisite course or the department's one-level-below course. But given the superior results of the corequisite model, Kalchik says the department is discussing whether to phase out the one-level-below course entirely. The AIM community is excited that the corequisite course may soon be the only option for students placed below transfer in English, and Kalchik and Alfonsi are already preparing for the next cycle of the community of practice, which they hope will draw 15 to 20 participants.

"We want to make sure faculty are supported to adapt to the unknown," says Kalchik. "If we get students we haven't figured out how to reach just yet, we want to continue to experiment until we find the strategies that work."

Zahra Amiri came to Sacamento City College as a recent immigrant from Iran. Despite being unsure of the academic writing conventions of a new country, she excelled in the community environment of the college's corequisite course, earning As in both transfer English and the subsequent English class. In fall 2018, she will transfer to UC Irvine.
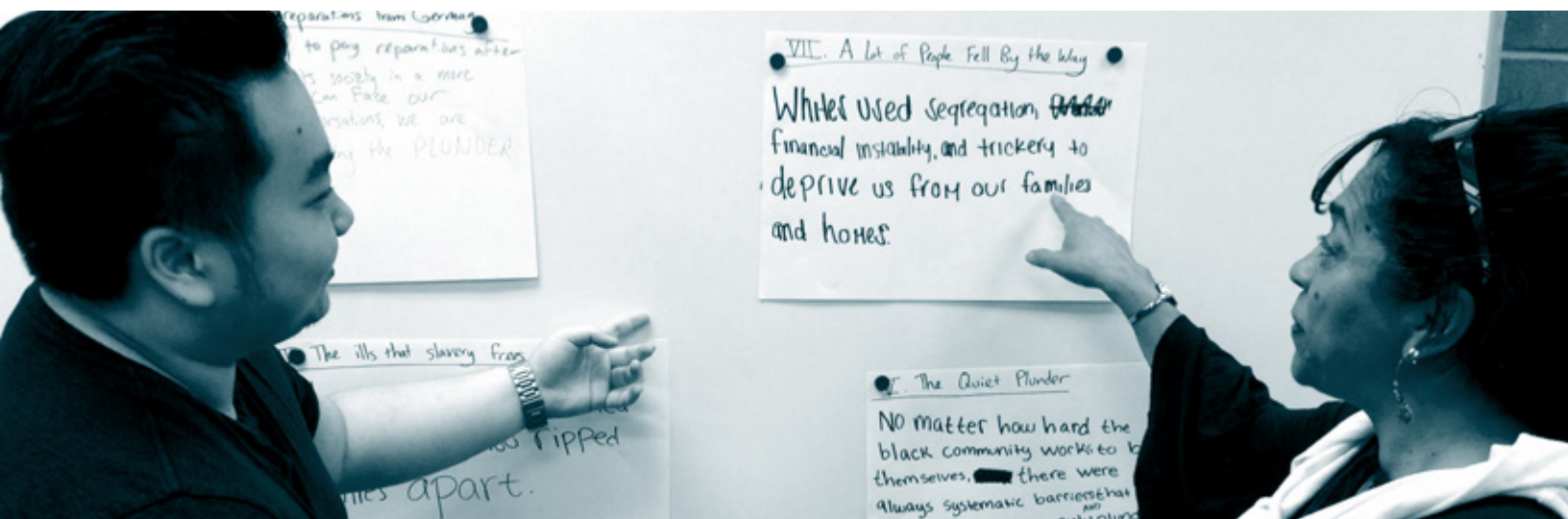
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