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The CATESOL Journal

Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/86x6z15v>

Journal

The CATESOL Journal, 9(1)

ISSN

1535-0517

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Publication Date

1996

DOI

10.5070/B5.36538

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Noncredit to Credit Articulation: The City College of San Francisco Model

City College of San Francisco serves approximately 21,000 students a semester in our noncredit program and 4,000 students in our credit program. FTE for noncredit is approximately 5,500 and for credit, 1,700. Over half of the students we serve are Chinese, and nearly one fifth are Hispanic. Approximately 13% of our students are Russian, and Southeast Asians make up 9% of our student population. Twenty-five percent of our noncredit students have already had some college education, and another 38% have had some high school.

Noncredit ESL classes are offered at six major campuses and numerous outside locations. Credit ESL classes were offered almost exclusively at the Phelan campus up until several years ago. Since the merger of the noncredit and credit programs, described below, a larger variety of credit classes are offered at the other campuses. The noncredit program currently offers eight levels—beginning-low 1 to intermediate-high 8. Prior to fall, 1994, the program consisted of seven levels ranging from literacy to ESL 600. Courses were revised to align with the state model standards in fall, 1994. The credit program offers seven levels ranging from beginning to low advanced as listed in Table 1.

The ESL program recognized a need to facilitate the transition of students from credit to noncredit classes in the 1980s. However, no articulation program existed. Prior to 1990, the noncredit and credit programs were administered by separate divisions at the college and, in fact, the credit ESL program was part of the English department. This meant that the administration, faculty leadership, counseling departments, and testing programs were all separate. Thus, noncredit students who wanted to take credit classes needed to fill out a separate application, take a different placement test, and negotiate the registration process on their own at a different cam-

pus, just as if it were a different institution. The ESL program began to facilitate the transition from noncredit to credit by negotiating an agreement in the early 1980s whereby students who passed a noncredit Level 600 Certificate Test were guaranteed placement into ESL 3 (now ESL 62) in the credit program, no matter how they placed on the credit placement test. However, as described here, we found that transition rates were low.

Table 1
ESL Programs at City College of San Francisco

NONCREDIT CLASSES		CREDIT CLASSES		
Course Name	ESL Course	Description	Hours/Units	
Beginning low 1				
Beginning low 2	22	Grammar, Writing,	20 hours	
Beginning high 3		Reading, Listening	10 units	
Beginning high 4	32	Grammar, Writing	20 hours	
Intermediate low 5		Reading, Listening	10 units	
Intermediate low 6	42	Grammar & Writing	5 hours/3 units	
Intermediate high 7	44	Reading & Vocabulary	5 hours/3 units	
	46	Conversation Skills	3 hours/2 units	
	48	42 plus 44	10 hours/6 units	
	52	Grammar & Writing	5 hours/3 units	
Intermediate high 8	54	Reading & Vocabulary	3 hours/2 units	
(formerly ESL 600)	56	Conversation Skills	3 hours/2 units	
	58	52 plus 54	8 hours/5 units	
	60	Grammar	3 hours/2 units	
	62	Composition	3 hours/3 units	
	68	60 plus 62	6 hours/5 units	
	72	Intermediate Composition	3 hours/3 units	
	82	Advanced Composition	3 hours/3 units	

Note: The lines indicate approximate equivalencies between the credit and noncredit programs.

OTHER NONCREDIT ESL CLASSES		OTHER CREDIT (ELECTIVE) ESL CLASSES	
Beginning Low Intensive		49 Pronunciation	3 hours/2 units
Beginning High Intensive		59 Oral Communication	3 hours/3 units
Intermediate Low Intensive		71 Editing Your Writing	3 hours/3 units
Intermediate High Intensive		79 Speaking & Pronunciation	3 hours/3 units

With the merger of the noncredit and credit divisions at City College in 1990, ESL became one department, with one faculty chair; counseling became one department as well. These changes facilitated and accelerated our efforts to develop an articulation program which has significantly increased the number of noncredit students enrolling in credit courses.

Existing Transfer Rates

To begin our investigation of the rate of movement from the noncredit to the credit programs, we decided, in the spring 1992 semester to track our noncredit Level 600 students. Level 600 (high-intermediate) was the highest level of ESL offered in the noncredit program, and we reasoned that students at this level of English competency were probably more ready than their lower level counterparts to move successfully to credit course work. Additionally, students in this level represented a relatively small and easy group to track.

Initial investigations revealed that very few Level 600 students were moving from the noncredit to the credit programs. It became our focus to determine why this articulation was not occurring.

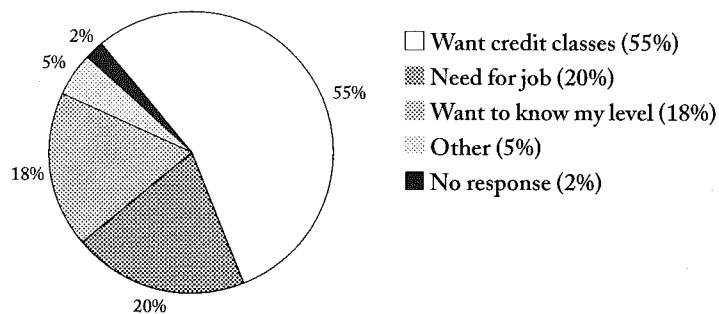
Upon completion of Level 600, students were eligible to take the Level 600 Certificate Test, an in-house multiple-measures tool assessing grammar, writing, listening, and oral production skills. Students who passed the Level 600 Certificate Test, in addition to receiving a certificate of program completion, were eligible for guaranteed placement into Level 3 (high intermediate) credit ESL classes. To enroll in credit classes, however, these students were required to complete the Credit Placement Test *in addition* to the Level 600 Certificate Test. Students who scored lower than Level 3 on the credit test were allowed to enter Level 3 classes based on their Level 600 exit scores. Students wishing to transfer to credit classes had to make their own arrangements to travel to one particular campus to take the Credit Placement Test and were responsible for negotiating the registration process. This apparently was not happening. Of the 66 students passing the Level 600 Certificate Test in the fall 1991 semester, only 14 took the Credit Placement Test. In spring 1992, of the 96 passing the certificate test, only 17 transferred to credit classes. Students either did not desire to transfer from noncredit to credit, or they needed assistance in making the transition.

Needs Assessment

Rather than simply speculate about reasons for the low transfer rates, we decided in the spring 1992 semester to go directly to the source for some answers. Level 600 students, we reasoned, would not have difficulty telling us what their needs were vis à vis articulation to credit. Perhaps they simply were uninterested in taking credit programs, or maybe they were having difficulty with the transition. To pinpoint why students were not transferring to the credit program, a needs assessment was conducted. All students participating in the Level 600 Certificate Test in the spring 1992 semester were asked why they were taking the exam. As can be seen in Figure 1, the majority (55%) of students indicated that they would like to

take credit classes. These data strongly indicated that Level 600 students indeed wanted to go to the credit program but were encountering obstacles. Our next step was to design and implement specific changes to help students move more easily from the noncredit to the credit program.

Figure 1
Level 600 Needs Assessment Results



Development and Implementation of the Process

The Test Delivery System

It seemed obvious that requiring transferring students to test twice made movement to credit less than attractive. To overcome this obstacle, the ESL department decided in the fall 1992 semester to give Level 600 students the Credit Placement Test in lieu of the traditional Level 600 Certificate Test. Equivalency scores were generated to ensure that those students not wishing to go to credit classes could receive a certificate of completion while those indicating a desire to transfer would receive accurate placement.

To eliminate the problems that students wishing to transfer to credit might have had regarding the logistics of testing and registration, testing was moved from the unfamiliar "credit" campus to a campus closer and more familiar to the noncredit student population.

Faculty Advisors

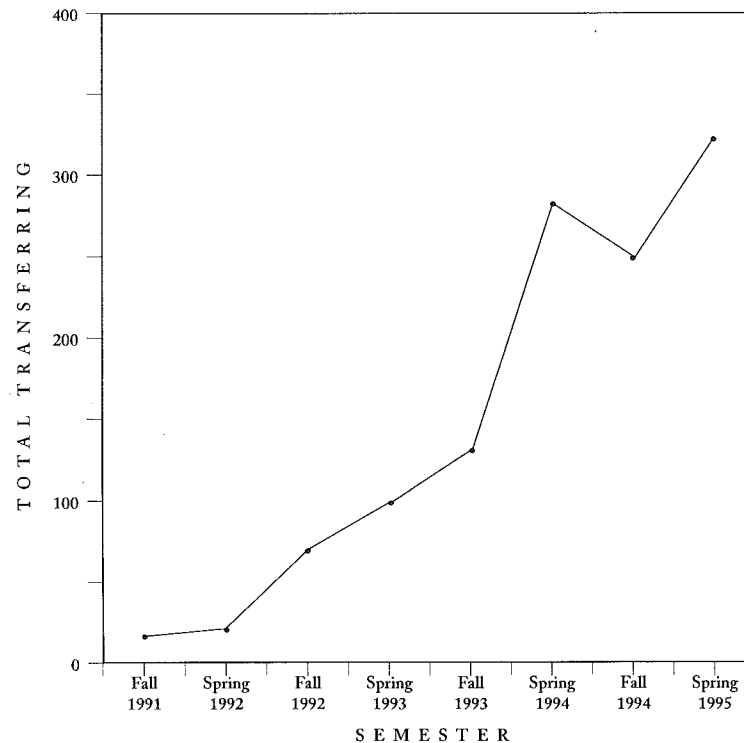
To ensure that students enrolled in Level 600 made informed choices about their academic future and received the help they needed in moving into the credit sector, faculty members from each of the five major campuses offering noncredit classes were hired as faculty advisors. The advisors, working with campus counselors, visited the Level 600 classrooms to dis-

cuss the differences between noncredit and credit curricula and assisted students in determining their academic goals. Following testing, those students wishing to transfer to credit classes were asked to attend special registration and orientation sessions.

Results

Conducting a needs assessment, changing the test delivery system, and introducing the use of faculty advisors and counselors produced a dramatic change in the number of Level 600 students transferring to credit. As Figure 2 indicates, a total of 62 Level 600 students transferred to credit in the fall 1992 semester, a significant increase from the two previous semesters. Naturally, we were delighted with these results and felt that we were well on our way to creating a good working model of articulation. Since 1992, we have tinkered with the system in a variety of ways to make transfer as easy as possible for those students interested.

Figure 2
Total Number of Students Transferring to Credit by Semester



Refining the Process

Once our basic model of articulation was developed, we began to look at specific points in the process with an eye toward refinement. It was not enough just to change the test delivery system and introduce faculty advisors; we wanted to gain the buy-in of other departments in our efforts. To that end, a committee was created to look at testing and registration. Aside from ESL department representation, the committee was comprised of members of the counseling department as well as campus deans and administrators in charge of testing and matriculation. By incorporating all members of the college community in our efforts, we found that changes to the process were more easily made and enforced.

The counseling department was recruited to take over the role first performed by faculty advisors. Noncredit teachers were given in-service training about the credit program so that they could better assist students in the decision-making process. The test delivery system was extended to all major campuses offering noncredit classes. Priority registration was given to noncredit students transferring to credit, and the entire process was expanded beyond Level 600 to include noncredit ESL students at all levels interested in transferring. The implementation and refinement of our articulation model has garnered excellent results. While a total of 62 students transferred from noncredit to credit in the fall 1992 semester, 313 students did so in the spring 1995 semester.

Currently, the model developed for use within the ESL department is being expanded to other noncredit departments. Specifically, we are studying how to improve articulation between noncredit ESL and other noncredit programs at City College of San Francisco, including vocational training, Adult Basic Education (ABE) and General Education Development (GED). Following the model, we will establish need, then examine how the test delivery system functions. We will create a committee of all interested and affected departments to determine how to best increase articulation for our students. We are confident, given the success of our articulation model, that we will be successful in our continued efforts to help students.

Summary

The experience at CCSF suggests that there are several key steps to take if you want to develop a successful articulation program.

Needs Assessment

First of all, determine how many students in the noncredit program are interested in enrolling in a credit program. Assess what obstacles may currently exist that you will need to overcome—for example, lack of knowledge about available credit programs, both on the part of students and instructors, student fear of moving out of their comfortable noncredit environment into the unknown world of credit, and lack of communication between the noncredit and credit programs. Determine at which levels you want to focus your articulation efforts. At CCSF we initially decided to focus on the top level of noncredit students. Although we believe that most students benefit from staying in noncredit throughout most of our program to gain basic language skills, we have expanded our outreach to Levels 4 and up because we know that a full range of classes is available in our credit program and some lower level students are interested in credit.

Buy-in of Major Players

Get a commitment from all major players to your plans. This includes faculty, counselors and administration. Noncredit faculty may be reluctant to “let the noncredit students go,” feeling that they will be losing students. They may need to be educated about the opportunities available for students in credit courses and the demands of a credit program so that they can provide accurate information to their students, encourage potential transfer students, and prepare them for the differences they will face in a credit program. Credit instructors can help orient noncredit instructors to the credit program.

Counselors are key players, too. The essential components of the CCSF program are the orientation workshops counselors provide and the assistance they give to students in working through the application and registration processes and advising students who matriculate into the credit program. Counselors from the credit and noncredit programs will need to work together to determine who will be responsible for what.

Faculty and counselor chairs or coordinators and administrators need to support the plan and direct its implementation. You will need to make decisions, either jointly or with input from faculty and counselors about such things as what placement instruments and procedures will be used, whether or not placement testing and counseling can and should take place at the noncredit campus, whether or not you can and want to use faculty advisors, and what level of students to focus your articulation efforts on. You'll want to find out how the noncredit and credit classes articulate. You may wish to consider implementing special noncredit classes that prepare students for academic study.

Test Delivery System

The most important decision to make is whether or not it would be helpful to bring the credit placement test to the noncredit location. This was an important step at CCSF to overcome the fear noncredit students might have of leaving their own comfortable campus. Consider eliminating duplicate testing so that you are not asking students who are exiting the noncredit program to take your exit test as well as the credit placement test. This will require establishing equivalency scores for the two tests if you wish to offer a certificate of completion to the noncredit students.

Priority Registration

Another key component of the CCSF model is priority registration for the noncredit students. Our credit classes are impacted; new students often find themselves on waiting lists their first semester and may not be able to enroll in classes they need. We realized that if students completed the application, placement, and registration process, only to find that they could not enroll in classes, our efforts would be in vain. We developed a system for lowering the cap on some of our credit classes in order to save a few seats in some sections that could be given to the transferring noncredit students. After the registration process is completed for these students, caps are raised back up to their normal level.

Location of Credit Classes

Consider bringing some credit ESL classes to the noncredit site. If the classes are available in familiar surroundings, students will be more likely to sign up. Once they have tried a credit class, they may find it easier to go to another campus to continue the credit program. At CCSF we increased the credit offerings at our noncredit sites and the times they are available. Now, instead of only the few night classes that were offered at the Phelan campus five years ago, we have some morning and afternoon classes as well. Each noncredit campus participates in the decision as to which credit course(s) are likely to be most needed at their site.

Student Support Services

Some extra student support seems to be necessary to assist students in making the jump into unknown territory. As discussed here, orientation workshops, aware and supportive faculty, counselor assistance in the application and registration process, and specially designed noncredit classes which prepare students for academic work should all be seriously considered.

Evaluation and Follow Up

Track your success rate. Find out how many noncredit students do indeed sign up for credit courses. Evaluate how your plan is working and make revisions as necessary. As described here, at CCSF we didn't implement all phases at once, but rather refined the process as we progressed. We suggest that a successful program can be designed for interinstitution as well as intra-institution articulation if attention is paid to these key components. ■

Acknowledgment

The authors wish to thank Annette Daoud from the City College of San Francisco Office of Research and Planning for her help with this article.