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Adult School to Community College: The Fremont Adult School-Ohlone College Model

The cities of Fremont and Newark are located in southern Alameda County, on the eastern side of San Francisco Bay. As with other communities in the Bay Area, Fremont and Newark have experienced a tremendous growth in their immigrant population. The adult immigrant ESL population is served by two distinct entities, the Fremont Adult School (FAS), which is under the jurisdiction of the local unified school district, and Ohlone College, the district's community college. The ESL program at FAS focuses primarily on life skills as outlined in the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) framework. The adult school program is seen as the first step for newly arrived immigrants in achieving the linguistic and cultural fluency necessary for success in the United States. Ohlone College is seen as the next step for students whose primary aim is to complete a postsecondary degree, that is, either an associate in science or arts, a four-year college degree or a postgraduate degree. The program at Ohlone College is academically oriented, its goal being the preparation of students for college-level English courses which in turn serve the students in content area courses.

Articulation Between Ohlone College and Fremont Adult School

The ESL program at Ohlone College was started in 1988 after much discussion and deliberation with colleagues at FAS. In fact, Ohlone had had ESL students for many years, and instructors had found different ways to accommodate their particular needs without any ESL courses. However, the idea of an ESL program was threatening to some constituencies on campus who feared that ESL students would receive space and funding that would otherwise go to other groups on campus. The idea was also of con-

cern to FAS, which had previously been the sole provider of ESL-specific instruction in the Fremont-Newark area for many years. Representatives from FAS attended ESL planning meetings in order to monitor the development of the program. Of primary concern to FAS was whether or not classes at Ohlone would duplicate what was being offered at FAS.

The general feeling at Ohlone College meshed well with the concerns at the adult school. Instructors at the college, already concerned by the impact an ESL program would have on other areas, did not favor a program that would encourage students to attend the college who would be better served by the life-skills focus of FAS. Thus, from the start, the focus at Ohlone was on building a program that would be academically oriented and that would be clearly distinct from the offerings at FAS.

After the college offered one year of trial ESL classes, I was hired full-time to coordinate the new ESL program. The concerns of the adult school were shared with me, and one of my first actions was to meet with the director of the ESL program for FAS. The importance of our meeting at that time was not so much to discuss curriculum as to establish lines of communication. We agreed that we wanted to see the adult school and the college working together to serve the needs of students in the area without the college duplicating the services offered by the adult school. At that time, the Ohlone ESL program consisted of three classes with a total of four sections. All three classes focused primarily on grammar and writing. FAS, on the other hand, offered general ESL classes at four levels, the curriculum of which was determined largely by the life skills outlined in the CASAS framework. As a result of establishing a line of communication between the two institutions, two programs were implemented, one of which has proven successful. In the second year of the program, I became quite aware of the low level of speaking skills for many of our students. Because of the academic focus of our program, it was not appropriate to develop a new course focused on everyday conversation skills. With approval from my division dean and the vice president of the college, I entered into talks with the director of the FAS ESL program about offering a section of a higher level FAS conversation class at the college. Classroom space in the afternoon at the college was available; FAS would control the class and receive all funding related to class attendance. The class was advertised by instructors in the college ESL classes. In its first semester, the class had 15 students; however, the second semester the number dropped to 10, making the class no longer cost effective for FAS to offer. In our evaluation of the class, the director of the FAS ESL program and I recognized several factors working against the success of the class. First, the class was not advertised in the regular college catalog.

Therefore, students often forgot about the class when planning their schedules, in spite of information given in their ESL classes. Second, the lack of credit attached to the class also affected it. Many students were on financial aid, and the FAS conversation class could not be counted towards their enrolled units. With regret, but recognizing the inherent problems of offering future FAS classes at the college, we discontinued the conversation class.

Assessment and Orientation for FAS Students

The second, more successful effort has been the facilitation of assessment and orientation for FAS students interested in transferring to the college. In this case, the Ohlone assessment counselor worked with the director of the ESL program at FAS to set up two dates for placement testing for adult school students. The adult school invited students who scored above eighth grade level on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) to sign up for the Ohlone assessment process. On the date of the assessment, the assessment counselor arranged for the tests to be given on site at the adult school. Orientation and counseling were offered either at the adult school or at the Ohlone campus about a week later. The students still needed to go to the college to register, but they were given priority over other new students for registration. This process has proved quite successful in placing students at the college. The adult school has also been able to use the results of the testing to encourage students to work on their foundational skills at the adult school by pointing out that the majority of students tested from FAS placed above the entry ESL level at the college.

The Ohlone assessment process has also been coordinated with the adult school in the other direction. Since some students who come to the college for placement are evaluated at below the level of ability needed for success in our foundation level of ESL classes, these students receive information during orientation on classes available at the adult school. Students who inform Ohlone counselors of their interest in registering for adult school classes are able to bypass the waiting list at the adult school.

The Present Ohlone College Program

Today, the ESL program at Ohlone College consists of nine classes at two levels. These classes include speech/conversation, reading, grammar, listening, and writing. Entry into the ESL program is determined by an assessment process, including the Secondary Level English Proficiency Test (SLEP), currently under validation, and a holistically scored essay.

The Ohlone ESL program, because of its academic focus, overlaps only minimally with the ESL program at FAS. Due to student demand, the

FAS program has added some academically focused classes in the different skill areas of grammar, writing, reading, listening, and conversation one day a week. These classes have had no appreciable impact on enrollment at the college because the students who enroll in them are enrolled FAS students. Similarly, students already enrolled at Ohlone find it inconvenient to attend classes at the FAS campus and thus the two programs do not compete for students. Furthermore, the affected classes at both institutions are limited enough that demand continues to outstrip availability.

The only area of current concern is the reading program at Ohlone. Reading instructors at the college who also work for the adult school believe that many of the students currently enrolling in reading programs at the college would benefit greatly by first attending classes at FAS. However, it has been difficult to articulate the Ohlone reading program with the reading program at FAS. The earlier failure with the FAS conversation class at the college has made the college and FAS very cautious about expending limited resources on bringing another FAS class to the Ohlone campus. Due to recent lawsuits concerning access to ESL programs, counselors at the college do not bring up FAS as an educational option when students have already placed into one of the college's ESL grammar classes. Even suggestions by instructors that students might want to attend an FAS class to increase their skill in a given area are not readily accepted by students because of both the inconvenience of attending classes at a different site and the perceived relative prestige of attending college as opposed to adult school classes. With the validation and implementation of the SLEP, even if students clearly test below the entry level for the college's reading courses, it is doubtful whether students can be successfully encouraged to attend FAS reading courses for their foundational work.

Factors Contributing to Successful Articulation

Articulation between FAS and Ohlone College has been a cooperative effort. Here are factors which I believe have contributed to its general success.

First, Ohlone and FAS have clearly separate programs. As described above, the programs overlap in only a minimal way. Furthermore, Ohlone College does not offer any noncredit classes in ESL. As a result, Ohlone does not draw away students from the adult school who might otherwise be attracted by either the perceived prestige of attending a college versus an adult school program or by the fact that financial aid is more readily available at the college. In the same vein, FAS does not offer classes at the academic level of classes at Ohlone College. Students thus have a clear

choice of which institution to attend based on their English ability level, needs, and interests.

Second, Ohlone College and FAS have maintained a good working relationship since the start of the ESL program at Ohlone. As coordinator of the program from its inception, I was able to make sure that I was in contact with FAS to address any of their concerns. Another circumstance that helps the relationship between the two institutions is that several part-time instructors work both at Ohlone and at FAS. Concerns from the adult school are quickly relayed to me, and I can respond promptly before the concerns become problems.

Third, Ohlone is fortunate to have an assessment counselor who is concerned with maintaining quality articulation with the adult school. Our assessment counselor continues to work closely with the director of the ESL program at FAS to help streamline the process for adult school students to attain admission to Ohlone.

Fourth, at the current time, more ESL students seek to enroll than both institutions can serve. The waiting list at FAS is in the hundreds, and dozens of students are unable to get into ESL classes at Ohlone every semester. Thus students are not a scarce commodity causing a competitive spirit to arise between the two campuses serving this urban area.

It is uncertain how the needs and numbers of ESL students in the Fremont-Newark area will change in the future. However, it is certain that as long as Ohlone College and FAS keep open the lines of communication and work together to articulate our respective programs, the students in the area will be well served. ■