

NORCO COLLEGE

Research Project Summary

STEP AHEAD PROGRAM

In the summer of 2011, 58 students were selected to participate in Step Ahead. To recruit participants, Norco College offered priority registration for fall semester and an opportunity to retake the placement exam. There were two main objectives for the Step Ahead program: 1.) Provide “refresher workshops” and allow students’ to repeat placement tests in English & math; and 2.) Successfully transition and prepare participants to enroll in fall 2011 semester. To improve students’ transition from high school to college, the program exposed participants to many of the services available on the campus. This was achieved by offering participants daily workshops that dealt with the following topics: Career and Technical Education (CTE); Completing the financial aid application (FAFSA); Eligibility requirements to participate in CalWORKs and student employment; Learning Resource Center; Disability Resource Center; EOPS; Trio-Student Support Services; Puente; Using and navigating WebAdvisor; and scholarly expectations of students by faculty. Students were also required to complete a guidance course to learn about career, become familiar with the transfer process, and complete a student education plan. Participants were also provided with the opportunity to apply for admission into a student support program such as EOPS, Trio’s Student Support Services (SSS), or Puente.

The outcomes that were identified for the Step Ahead program were as follows: retest results (number of levels of English and math skipped), persistence (number of students enrolled in Fall 11), and success rates of students who enrolled in English and math courses in Fall 11. Regarding retest results and persistence, the median improvement in placement for English and math combined was 3 levels; and 54 of the 58 Step Ahead students who completed the program enrolled in fall 2011. In addition, there was an unanticipated outcome in English placement. Many non-native English speaking students tend to take the lowest level English composition course and progress through a sequence of writing courses that are not best for their educational needs. The Step Ahead program rerouted these students to the ESL sequence and most of these students were placed higher in the ESL sequence. The following tables identify student’s initial placement (on left) and their retest placement (across the top) for math and English.

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Number of Students at First & Second Placement-Math

		Second Math Placement			Total
		63-Arith	52-Alg1	35-Alg2	
First Math Placement	63-Arith	8	14	7	29
	64-PAlg	0	1	1	2
	52-Alg1	0	4	9	13
	35-Alg2	1	1	9	11
Total		9	20	26	55

Number of Students at First & Second Placement-English

		Second English Placement					Total
		Placed in ESL	60A	60B	50	1A	
First English Placement	60A/ESL	18	1	2	3	0	24
	60A	0	11	0	8	0	19
	60B	0	1	0	2	0	3
	50	0	0	1	5	2	8
Total		18	13	3	18	2	54

Of all students in Step Ahead 2011, the percent testing into the lowest level of math was 53% initially; after retesting only 16% remained at the lowest level of math. In English, students scoring into the lowest level were 80% initially; after retesting 40% remained at the lowest level English/ESL and the remaining students scored into higher levels of English or ESL courses.

The last set of outcomes tracked Step Ahead students in their English and math courses during the Fall 11 semester. Success rates for Step Ahead students were then compared to those for the non-Step Ahead students in the same classes that they were enrolled. A *t*-test for independent groups was conducted in order to determine if there were significant differences in success between Step Ahead students and their peers in English and math. If there were no significant differences between groups, this would indicate that Step Ahead students performed equivalently to their non-Step Ahead peers. If they did significantly better, it would indicate they were better prepared than their peers; if they did significantly worse, it would indicate they were less prepared than their peers. The following tables identify the number of Step Ahead students enrolled in English, math and ESL classes; and results of the *t*-test analysis for English, math, and ESL success rates.

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COURSE	# Students	Success in Course
ENG-1A	2	100.0%
ENG-50	17	64.7%
ENG-60A	8	75.0%
ENG-60B	8	62.5%
ESL-54	3	33.3%
ESL-55	14	78.6%
MAT-35	27	40.7%
MAT-52	15	20.0%
MAT-63	5	40.0%
MAT-65	1	100.0%
Total	100	61.5%

Group		N	Mean
English Success	Step Ahead	35	68.6%
	Not SA	306	76.5%
Math Success	Step Ahead	48	35.4%*
	Not SA	626	56.4%
ESL Success	Step Ahead	17	70.6%
	Not SA	44	61.4%

* Indicates significant difference from other group ($p < .05$)

These data indicate that English and ESL Step Ahead students performed at equivalent levels to their peers in the same classes (although Step Ahead students in English were lower than their peers). Math success rates indicated that Step Ahead students performed at significantly worse rates than their peers in the same classes and may indicate they were not adequately prepared.