

## CSU Transforming Course Design: Enhancing Learning Outcomes

September, 2007

Over the summer, faculty members and other educators from 18 CSU campuses participated in *Transforming Course Design* workshops, held at San Marcos, San Jose State and Sonoma State. Amongst the issues they explored were the diverse ways to address the twin challenges of improving student learning and reducing instructional costs. This September *Update* reviews some of their ideas and plans for enhancing student learning outcomes; October's *Update* will provide an overview of the discussions on containing the costs of instruction.

### Improving Success in Course Grades

The most common measure for enhanced learning outcomes is an improvement in course grades (often measured as a reduction in unsuccessful grades of D, F & W). Most course transformations achieve this by combining improved instructional designs – better alignment with student pre-course knowledge, targeting specific learning challenges through the scholarship of teaching and learning, encouraging more active and collaborative learning – with innovative use of academic technology for continuous assessment, prompt feedback, just-in-time assistance, and monitoring student progress to identify those most in need of support.

### Enhancing General Education Outcomes

The CSU Transforming Course Design program is exploring ways to go beyond past Course Redesign initiatives, to encompass a wider range of learning outcome enhancements. Several projects focus on student capabilities in Information Literacy and Computing Technology, for use across the curriculum; others are centered on outcomes from General Education courses and on development of student capability for self-directed learning.

### Example targets from current CSU projects:

**CSU Northridge:** improve the percentage of students in Math 103 – *Mathematical Methods for Business* who earn grades of C or better, via a modular lab to integrate advanced software and face-to-face time with instructors

**CSU San Bernardino:** offer the Gateway program for enhanced first-year experience to more students, via scalable inquiry-based courses augmented with online resources, online learning communities & e-portfolios.

**San Francisco State:** improve the success rate (C grade or better) for Intro Calculus through interactive online materials and active collaborative classroom learning

### Improving Outcomes Beyond the Course

Our faculty are also concerned about how student success within a course translates into outcomes in later courses and in their professional careers: this requires that we improve both course grades and longer term retention and application of course content. One project is enhancing student field work experience to better prepare them for career success. Many project teams have expressed interest in recent advances in understanding *Threshold Concepts* that “transform student thinking in irreversible ways” and develop capability to think/work as practitioners.

### Engagement, Retention and Degree Completion

Student course success is closely linked to larger outcomes such as engagement, retention and degree completion. Current CSU projects target these goals with a diverse set of approaches: one project is responding to an ongoing source of disengagement in the student course experience, another focuses on retention and success for junior level transfer students. One multi-campus team is developing new collaborations across CSU campuses to increase course availability and quality to fit student needs.

**References:** *Faculty Professional Choices in Teaching That Foster Student Success*, John Braxton, invited paper for National Symposium on Postsecondary Student Success, June 2006 <http://nces.ed.gov/npec/papers.asp>

- *Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge: Linkages to Ways of Thinking and Knowing in the Disciplines*, Meyer, J.H.F. and Land, R. 2005, [www.tla.ed.ac.uk/etil/docs/ETLreport4.pdf](http://www.tla.ed.ac.uk/etil/docs/ETLreport4.pdf)
- *Increasing Success for Underserved Students: Redesigning Introductory Courses*, Carol Twigg, 2005, <http://www.thencat.org/Monographs/IncSuccess.htm>

**More information:** [http://www.calstate.edu/ats/transforming\\_course\\_design/](http://www.calstate.edu/ats/transforming_course_design/) [tcarey@calstate.edu](mailto:tcarey@calstate.edu)