Los Angeles Mission College (LAMC)

[3]. Data Analysis – Was your college’s basic skills program more successful in 2010-2012 than it was in 2008-2010? How did you determine the answer? How did you measure the success?

In order to assess the success of the basic skills program at LAMC, we explored the progression of cohorts of students (Fall 2008 cohorts and Fall 2010 cohorts) through basic skills ESL, English, and mathematics courses into transferable coursework. The student cohorts were based on students enrolled in basic skills classes in the following categories: 1) ESL Writing (two levels below transfer English), 2) English Writing (two levels below transfer English), and 3) mathematics (two levels below transfer mathematics). We measured success by looking at the percentage of students in the cohorts who successfully completed a transfer-level course in English (for the ESL Writing and English Writing cohorts) or mathematics (for the mathematics cohort) within two years.

In terms of the ESL Writing category, 18.5% of students in the Fall 2008 ESL Writing cohort successfully completed a transfer-level English course within 2 years (i.e., by the end of Spring 2010), whereas 10.6% of students in the Fall 2010 ESL Writing cohort successfully completed a transfer-level English course within 2 years (i.e., by the end of Spring 2012). Thus, it appears that the Fall 2010 ESL Writing cohort was less successful than the 2008 cohort; however, LAMC cut English course offerings in 2011-2012 compared to 2009-2010 by approximately 20%. Thus, students in the Fall 2010 cohort had significantly less opportunities to take the next two levels of English than did students in the Fall 2008 cohort within the timeframe of our analysis. We also explored average class size differences in the cohorts and found that the ESL Writing classes in Fall 2010 were larger by more than 10 students per class compared to Fall 2008. This appears to have had an impact on student success in the initial basic skills ESL course, where more personalized attention is beneficial to students, by about 7.4% (the Fall 2008 ESL Writing success rate was 81.5% whereas the Fall 2010 cohort success rate was 74.1%), and consequently success could be expected to be lower for those students in future English courses as well.

In terms of the English Writing category, 17.8% of students in the Fall 2008 cohort successfully completed a transfer-level English course within 2 years, whereas 21.7% of students in the Fall 2010 cohort successfully completed a transfer-level English course within 2 years, which is a 3.9% increase in the progression success rate. This improvement in successful progression is particularly notable given the cuts in English course offerings discussed above. Thus our basic skills initiative efforts in this area appear to be having a positive effect.

In terms of the mathematics category, 12.1% of students in the Fall 2008 cohort successfully completed a transfer-level mathematics course within 2 years, whereas 8.5% of students in the Fall 2010 cohort successfully completed a transfer-level mathematics course within 2 years. As with English, the mathematics course offerings at LAMC were reduced in 2011-2012 compared to 2009-2010 (by approximately 8.9%), and this may have played a role in the 3.6% decrease in success rates between these two cohorts because students may not have
been able to get the courses they needed. Furthermore, when students delay taking the next
course(s) in the mathematics sequence, their success rates in those latter courses decrease.

When disaggregating the data by gender, age, and ethnicity, we had the following
discoveries: 1) Gender distribution was similar across all categories in that females were in the
majority in all cohorts – ESL Writing cohort students were 73% female, English Writing cohort
students were 60% female, and mathematics cohort students were 61% female (the LAMC
student body is about 61% female). Females and males succeeded at approximately equal rates
in the three areas. 2) In terms of age, 77% of students in the ESL Writing cohorts were over the
age of 25, whereas only 15% of English Writing cohort students and 18% of mathematics cohort
students were over the age of 25. Age was highly related to progression success rates for the
ESL Writing cohorts, with 29.4% of cohort students age 25 or younger passing a transfer-level
English course within two years, whereas only 9.5% of students over age 25 did so – this is most
likely due to the different educational goals of students in these different age categories.
Students in the English Writing cohorts age 25 and younger were also more successful in terms
of progression through transfer-level English than students over age 25 by 9%, whereas age did
not have much of a relationship to mathematics successful progression rates. 3) Looking at
ethnicity, Hispanic students made up the majority of the cohorts (63% in ESL Writing, 88% in
English Writing, and 81% in mathematics), which is a reflection of the primarily-Hispanic
student body at LAMC. In terms of success at a transfer-level course within two years, in all
cohorts Hispanics (and African-Americans in English Writing and mathematics) had lower
progression success rates than Asians/Pacific Islanders, with the largest discrepancy in ESL
Writing progression rates, in which Asians/Pacific Islanders succeeded at a rate 23.8% higher
than that of Hispanics. This ethnic difference may also be a factor in the age discrepancy data
above, as the younger group of students in the ESL Writing cohorts contained more
Asians/Pacific Islanders than the older group of students, which was primarily Hispanic.
Hispanics also had lower progression success rates than White Non-Hispanics in ESL Writing
and English Writing by 6.3% and 7.8%, respectively. These ethnic disparities are not unique to
LAMC, and closing these equity gaps is an area that we will be exploring further.

In conclusion, our results indicate that LAMC’s basic skills program was more successful
in 2010-2012 than it was in 2008-2010 for the English Writing category. For ESL Writing and
mathematics, the successful progression rates were lower in 2010-2012 than in 2008-2010;
however, the declines in these rates were not as large as the percentages of classes that were cut
in these disciplines. This may indicate that had classes not been cut, we may have expected to
see increases in progression success in these two areas as well. A concern raised by these data is
the need for careful consideration of the impacts on student progression, current/future course
success, persistence, and completion when courses are cut and when class sizes increase,
especially in developmental courses where smaller class sizes and more personalized attention
can be of great current and future benefit to students. Finally, the equity gaps identified when
looking at the disaggregated data in terms of age and ethnicity will need to be explored further
and addressed.