



South Carolina Course Alignment Project

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Overview of the Course Alignment Project

In response to the Education and Economic Development Act of 2005 (EEDA), the state has embarked on an exciting initiative called the *South Carolina Course Alignment Project*. This project, led by the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education in partnership with the South Carolina Department of Education and the South Carolina Technical College System, is facilitated by the Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC) at the University of Oregon. The purpose of the project is to determine the degree of alignment between high school courses and entry-level college courses with the goal of improving alignment so students may have a seamless transition from secondary to postsecondary education.

Aligning secondary and postsecondary courses will:

- Provide explicit information on the content and skills necessary for postsecondary success in order to improve student preparation for college coursework.
- Create clear pathways between high school and college coursework and reduce curriculum redundancy between high school and college.
- Improve high school graduation rates, reduce the need for remedial instruction, and improve college retention and graduation rates.

December Kickoff Meeting for Stakeholders

A kickoff meeting for this project was held Tuesday, December 11, 2007, in Columbia for key stakeholders. The meeting featured a keynote address by nationally-recognized speaker and consultant, the University of Oregon's Dr. David Conley of the Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC). During his address, Dr. Conley presented some interesting information, such as:

- 77% of high school students believe a high school diploma means the student "has at least learned the basics," while only 39% of employers and 33% of professors believe the same.
- According to the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (March 6, 2006), nearly 1/3 of high school teachers do not understand the level of preparation required of their students for college success and nearly 2/3 have a less-than-complete understanding.
- Six times as many high school teachers think students are very well prepared for college writing as do college faculty.

Dr. Conley also presented the four key dimensions of college readiness which include: Key Cognitive Strategies; Key Content Knowledge; Academic Behaviors (self-management); and Contextual Skills and Awareness ("college knowledge"). Then, he addressed the general characteristics of college-ready students as well as provided some sample student performances.

Dr. Garrison Walters, Executive Director of the Commission on Higher Education; Dr. Jim Rex, State Superintendent of Education; and Dr. Barry Russell, President of the South Carolina Technical College System, also spoke at the meeting. Each speaker highlighted the importance his organization places on this groundbreaking statewide initiative.

Additionally, the meeting included representatives from the state's higher education institutions, the Department of Education, the Technical College System, the Commission on Higher Education, K-12 organizations, high schools, professional teacher organizations,

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South Carolina Course Alignment Project

“We are pleased to bring you this inaugural edition of the *South Carolina Course Alignment Project Newsletter*. We believe this newsletter will help keep all stakeholders (secondary teachers, faculty, deans and chief academic officers of two- and four-year institutions, and members of other educational agencies in South Carolina) informed about the project.

We are very excited about the project and its potential to impact education in our state positively. We look forward to collaborating with all stakeholders to better align secondary and postsecondary education in South Carolina.”

-- Dr. Gail M. Morrison
Director,
Division of Academic
Affairs & Licensing
Commission on Higher
Education

business and industry leaders, legislators and other policymakers, and staff from EPIC.

This meeting was extremely helpful in generating discussion about the project as well as identifying areas of concern as indicated by the environmental scan conducted by EPIC.

Results of the Environmental Scan

EPIC began by conducting an environmental scan of the South Carolina educational system and analyzing South Carolina high school standards and *Knowledge and Skills for University Success (KSUS)* standards (created by the nationally recognized *Standards for Success* project). The environmental scan and its associated analysis identified the strengths and weaknesses that currently exist concerning course alignment and transition from secondary to post-secondary education.

As a discrepancy analysis, the environmental scan contrasts what the current situation is with what it could be. For analysis, data were gathered on high school performance in college preparatory courses and high school completion with the goal of highlighting the current state of student transition.

The results of the scan are divided by key issues. Some of the more notable findings include:

Assessments

Key Points

Academic performance by the best high school students (as indicated by Advanced Placement (AP) participation) is below the national average with 22.0% of students taking an AP exam before graduating compared to 24.2% nationally. Similarly, only 56.9 % of students taking AP exams in 2006 scored a 3 or higher, compared to 61.0% nationally.

South Carolina's average SAT scores are among the lowest of the 24 states that use the SAT as a primary admissions test. Only 14% of South Carolina students scored in the top 20% of students nationally.

Observations

South Carolina's system of standards and assessments can become better aligned over time.

Performance on AP tests can potentially be strengthened via better articulation and more explicit college readiness expectations.

More programs which provide college-like experiences in high school can help raise expectations.

Standards and Alignment

Key Points

The South Carolina system of K-12 standards and assessments has not been systematically aligned with the knowledge and skills necessary for postsecondary readiness. However, after recent revision, they now compare better to national best practice standards.

Observations

Potential for better alignment with colleges exists because all high school students must take at least math and English during the senior year, and many will likely take science as well.

Remediation rates can be reduced substantially with better alignment of courses for students who go directly from high school to college.

College Readiness

Key Points

Math and computer science courses – critical for preparing for success in the 21st century



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Selected feedback from the December Stakeholders Meeting:

“Excellent initiative - long overdue.”

“Great start - I look forward to the outcome.”

“The course alignment project will be a great deal of work, but is necessary and valuable work.”

“Worthwhile goal - looking forward to progression of project and opportunities for communication and collaboration among secondary and postsecondary institutions.”

“Excellent opportunity to increase communication between high schools and colleges.”

“This meeting and project are long overdue! Need to be creating a clearly aligned pathway K-16 for every student in SC.”

economy – had the lowest passage rates (78%) for courses completed during the first year of college at four-year institutions.

Approximately 1/3 of South Carolina college students reported taking at least one remedial course during college; however, most remediation takes place in the two-year institutions.

In 2006, 40% of undergraduate students were male while 60% were female. These percentages likely indicate an emerging educational attainment gap in South Carolina.

Observation

Improvements in readiness could lead to increases in postsecondary enrollment and improved persistence.

High School Course Enrollment

Key Points

34% of South Carolina high school students enroll in at least one upper-level science course, compared to 40-44% of students in the top three states in the nation.

49% of South Carolina high school students enroll in at least one upper-level math course, compared to 64-74% of students in the top three states in the nation.

The percentage of South Carolina high school students enrolling in upper-level science and math courses has increased by 13% between 1992 and 2006 (due in part both to increased high school graduation requirements and increased statewide pre-college requirements).

High School Graduation

Key Points

No other state requires more course credits (in Carnegie units) than South Carolina for high school graduation.

Graduation rates in South Carolina reveal achievement gaps: white students graduate at a higher rate (80%) than black (67%) and hispanic (58%) students.

In terms of graduation rates, South Carolina ranks among the lowest in the nation.

Observation

Efforts to engage students from ethnic and racial minority groups in activities connected with postsecondary access and success could help close the gap in graduation rates.

College Enrollment

Key Points

29% of students enroll in college by age 19 (this enrollment percentage is lower than 47 other states, but it is primarily because the proportion of students who graduate from high school within four years is lower).

About 2/3 of high school graduates immediately pursue some form of postsecondary education.

South Carolina students are less likely to attend college if they do not do so immediately upon graduation from high school

South Carolina families who send a child to a public college in-state devote a larger proportion of their income to the cost of attendance than do families in most other states.

Postsecondary Completion

Key Points

The six-year degree completion rate for students at South Carolina public four-year institutions was 60% for the 1999 beginning cohort which exceeds the average completion rate (52%) for the Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB) States.

For the cohort beginning in 2002, the completion rate at two-year institutions was 13%, which is



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https://www.epiconline.org/south_carolina

lower than the 17% average for SREB states.

The transfer rate for the same cohort was 14% for South Carolina and 17% regionally.

Retention

Key Points

58% of students who do not require remediation earn baccalaureate degrees within eight years; 17% of students who require remediation earn baccalaureate degrees within eight years.

Postsecondary institutions in South Carolina retain full-time students at a much higher rate than part-time students.

The rate at which full-time students are retained puts South Carolina's four-year institutions in the middle when compared to all other states.

Observation

The retention rate of first-time, degree-seeking students suggest that better alignment of high school and college expectations could potentially improve the retention rate.

Economic Implications

Key Points

42% of adults in South Carolina have an income above the national median.

Median annual earnings for workers aged 25 and older without a high school diploma were \$21,268. Those with a high school diploma and no college earned \$30,316 while those with an associate's degree earned \$36,348 and those with bachelor's degrees earned \$48,724, which is almost 130% more than those who did not earn a high school diploma.

Observations

The proportionately higher cost for attending in-state institutions suggests a parallel responsibility for the state to ensure students are truly prepared to succeed in entry-level college courses.

A dynamically-changing South Carolina economy suggests demand for postsecondary levels of education will continue to increase rapidly.

The college-going pool must be expanded and retention of those students must be increased.

Over the last three decades, the economic value of a high school diploma has declined, while the economic value of a four-year degree has increased.

Next Steps

The next phase of the course alignment project is to continue to create a statewide process to support the initiative by developing programmatic and policy responses to address issues identified by EPIC. The environmental scan highlights challenges and opportunities which education stakeholders can use as a framework to develop strategies, programs, and solutions locally. The next phase will also design and pilot paired courses to improve alignment between secondary and postsecondary education.

Did You Know?

EPIC has organized and conducted more meetings that bring together high school and college faculty to work on alignment issues than any other organization in the nation! As part of Oregon's PASS project, EPIC staff organized and facilitated dozens of meetings over seven years in support of the initiative. Nine national meetings involving over 400 university faculty



conducted by:



South Carolina Course Alignment Project

We welcome your suggestions to improve this newsletter. Continuously, we seek to engage in meaningful communication about the project. Accordingly, we would appreciate suggestions for future articles or content. Please contact Ms. Trena Houp at thoup@che.sc.gov or 803.737.4853 with your suggestions.

members for the Standards for Success (S4S) research project followed. EPIC staff have also organized and facilitated at least 20 meetings designed to improve high school-to-college alignment for the College Board, the State of Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and Texas Education Agency, and numerous other state and national entities.

EPIC has more expertise conducting large-scale analyses of course documents than any other organization in the nation. For example, EPIC currently is the prime contractor for the AP Course Audit. In this project, EPIC is responsible for reviewing 100,000 courses from all AP courses offered globally in 38 subject areas. No other organization approaches this level of capacity and expertise to conduct studies and projects that involve the analysis of classroom-based materials generally and, more specifically, materials used to determine the alignment between high school and college.

Key EPIC staff are recognized as national experts on how to improve high school-to-college alignment through a unique process of standard setting, usage of web-based tools to analyze course syllabi and other documents, pilot courses, and exemplary and benchmark materials that have been developed and employed exclusively by the organization.