

College Student Achievement Project



Inside this issue:

Data Collection and Analysis 2012/2013	1
Assessment of Students' Mathematics Skills	1
Language GAP Analysis	2
CSAP and Research Ethics	2
Next Time....	3

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The CSAP team wishes all our readers a very happy New Year. This issue of CSAP News contains an update on progress on the first cycle of our research, information about two new areas of research that we are carrying out this year, and a description of some of the ethical aspects of conducting this type of study.

Data Collection and Analysis 2012/2013

By the time this newsletter reaches you, we hope to have the data for the first cycle of CSAP collected and validated. The first round of analysis of student achievement in college mathematics and language courses relates to students who entered college in Fall 2011 and we aim to have a preliminary report available in March or April 2013. This can then serve as support for deliberations by the college and school communities in the spring and fall. We plan to hold a Provincial Forum in November 2013 and issue a final report on this cycle early in 2014.

Assessment of Students' Mathematics Skills

About two-thirds of the Ontario colleges conduct assessments of the mathematics skills of first year students as they enrol and the CSAP team is undertaking a survey of these assessments – what instruments are used, how students' results on these assessments are used, how the tests relate either to college programs and secondary school mathematics courses, and the feasibility of developing a common (i.e. province-wide) assessment instrument. This survey is almost complete and a report will be posted on the CSAP web site early in the New Year.

"...all research activity must ensure that ethical standards are maintained."

The report will propose possible future actions by the colleges and a period of discussion of these proposals will follow. Readers from either college or school communities with thoughts about such an assessment should feel free to share them with us (by writing to csap@senecacollege.ca).

Language Gap Analysis

Last year, the College Mathematics Project (CMP) team conducted a comprehensive analysis of the topics in first year college mathematics courses, both at the diploma level and those in foundational or preparatory level courses. This analysis was then mapped onto the elementary and secondary curriculum to discover where the topics most frequently appearing in college mathematics courses had been taught originally. The results of this research were reported in the CMP 2011 final report (see <http://collegemathproject.senecac.on.ca>). This year a similar 'gap analysis' is being conducted with respect to language courses (both English and French). By the end of this academic year we hope to have the results of the language study available for discussion by both college and school communities. Further details will be provided in future newsletters.

CSAP and Research Ethics

In the past several years the Canadian research community at both colleges and universities have become more aware of the need for their research not only to be conducted competently but also ethically. This affects scientific research involving living things but it also affects research involving human subjects. In the social sciences, national statements of ethical standards for research have been developed and most colleges and universities have Research Ethics Boards (REBs) who review all research activity to ensure that these standards are maintained.

One of these standards is that researchers must obtain the 'informed consent' of those who are in any sense the subjects of the research. For CSAP, this means that we have to obtain the consent of students whose records we are analysing. Part

of this consent is provided by students when they sign their applications to OCAS (the Ontario College Admission Service) and part when they enrol in a college program. But we also provide for any student to 'opt out', i.e. to decline having their records submitted to CSAP.

Another standard we must adhere to is privacy – this is also required by the (Ontario) Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA). No student's identity is known to the CSAP research team and, when we publish results, groups of fewer than five students are not shown in data tables. (If groups of one or two students were shown, it might be possible for their identities to be inferred which would breach their right to privacy.) CSAP takes its obligations to maintain the highest ethical standards and works with the Research Ethics Board of each college to ensure this. For further information write to csap@senecacollege.ca.

Next time....

The next issue of CSAP News will contain information about our first research report and the exciting new interactive CSAP database we are creating to make it much easier for personnel at both colleges and school boards to access their information and to conduct their own research. As always, if your name is not yet on our email list, please write to csap@senecacollege.ca. In addition, if your professional organisation would appreciate a regular CSAP Update for their executive or board meetings or for publication in its own journal or newsletter, please also let us know. CSAP team members are also available to speak about the project at provincial conferences.

To join the CSAP mailing list and receive regular email updates about the project, send us an email at csap@senecacollege.ca.

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