

College Student Achievement Project



Inside this issue:

CSAP Research	1
CSAP New Projects	1
Assessment Development Project	1
Learning Outcomes Development Project	2
Preparing for College English (& French): CSAP Gap Analysis Project	2

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CSAP Research

The CSAP research team has recently published a preliminary report on research on the mathematics and language achievement of students who entered college in Fall 2011. This report, which is available for viewing on the CSAP web site, contains preliminary data and should not be cited at this time. Further analyses of this research will be included in the CSAP Final Report of Cycle 1 to be published in early 2014. The primary purpose of the preliminary report is to stimulate discussion at the CSAP Provincial Forum which takes place on October 25th, 2013 in Toronto. The December issue of CSAP News will include a report on that Forum.

CSAP New Projects

During 2012-2013 the CSAP team completed a feasibility study into the development of a common mathematics assessment system for incoming college students, and common learning outcomes/curriculum for introductory mathematics courses. Following this study (the report of which is now available on the CSAP web site), the team has been given the go-ahead both by the colleges and by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to undertake two development projects, the Assessment Development Project (ADP) and the Learning Outcomes Development Project (LODP). The two projects will have the potential to impact both the colleges and the secondary schools, as they will result in a common mathematics assessment being used for all incoming students (in those programs where mathematics is an important foundation subject) and a common set of learning outcomes for a range of introductory mathematics courses.

Assessment Development Project

This project is in many ways the most radical development affecting the transition of students from secondary to postsecondary education in Ontario. The project will develop a computer-based mathematics assessment that will test the basic numeracy skills of students. The unique feature of the assessment system will be that it can be used in two distinct ways. In its formal use, it can be used by colleges to assess students who have been admitted to college to identify those who need additional support in mathematics. But the system can also be used in an informal way by students themselves, at any stage, prior to applying to college even, to identify their strengths and weaknesses in numeracy, and to obtain on-line remedial help as well. We believe that this system can not only streamline the colleges' use of assessment but assist students to prepare themselves better for success in college. The system will also enable secondary school mathematics teachers to help their students to be better prepared for college mathematics.

Learning Outcomes Development Project

In spring of 2012 the College Mathematics Project team published the results of research into student achievement in first semester college mathematics for students entering college in fall of 2010. In addition to the research on achievement, the team examined first semester course outlines from colleges and identified significant commonalities in mathematics courses. Based on these findings and at the request of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, the College Student Achievement Project (CSAP) team conducted a feasibility study into the development of a common learning outcomes and common curricula for first year mathematics courses for business and technology foundation and diploma programs. The results of this consultation recommended development of the common learning outcomes in technology foundation programs and business foundation and diploma programs, but not the development of common learning outcomes for technology diploma programs, or the development of common curricula².

This work will proceed in cooperation with the college system, beginning in September 2013 with completion scheduled for December 2014. The work of this project and that of the Assessment Development Project will be informed by an Advisory Committee comprised of mathematics faculty, college administrators, government representatives and other experts.

First the Learning Outcomes Development Project (LODP) team will update the course outline analysis framework that was used for the CMP2011 analysis. All colleges will be asked to provide current course outlines, addenda and samples of assessments for first semester technology foundations and first semester business foundations mathematics courses and first semester business diploma level mathematics courses in order to analyse existing learning outcomes, learning objectives and assessments. Next, the LODP team will identify learning outcome topic areas, including mapping back to individual college course learning outcomes and objectives. Draft common learning outcomes will be developed for validation by stakeholder groups, including Heads of Interdisciplinary Studies, Ontario College Mathematics Council, Heads of Technology, Heads of Business and the colleges in late spring 2014. It is anticipated that the feedback and validation process will be completed by September 2014. Release of the final outcomes is anticipated to be completed by December 2014.

Preparing for College English (& French):

CSAP Gap Analysis Project

The final report of the College Mathematics Project contained an analysis of first semester college mathematics courses and their relationship with the mathematics curriculum in grades 1-12. The CSAP Gap Analysis Project extends this line of research to include Language (English and French) courses and a report of this work will be published soon. In the report's first section, using four colleges as exemplars for each, we look at how language is taught in two different programs, through discrete courses and courses in which language outcomes are embedded. Our analysis of the programs demonstrates the pervasiveness of language throughout the curriculum, the importance of first semester communication courses in providing the foundational skills upon which all other courses rely, and thus, the need for well-developed language skills to be successful in all college programs.

We next provide an analysis of first semester communication courses. Although these courses use different approaches, have different descriptions, and are based on different textbooks, reading material and assessments, we found many more similarities than differences within their reading, writing, speaking and information literacy goals.

In the final section, we compare the main topics in regular Semester One communication courses to the learning outcomes of the English and French secondary school curriculum for Grades 8 – 12 to determine how the skills developed in secondary school compare to those expected by colleges of their incoming students and needed for success in communication, and, in fact, in all college courses. This analysis looks specifically at the impact of the secondary school courses linked to postsecondary destination in terms of how well they provide students with the skills, attitudes and abilities needed for success in college.

The report raises a number of questions. It is our hope that colleges and schools - Ministries, administrators and teachers - will come together to discuss them and arrive at actions that will best benefit our students.

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

The logo for Seneca College, featuring the word "Seneca" in a bold, red, sans-serif font.

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