Educational Research Review:
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Why students drop classes: Summary of a pilot study
M. Buechner

During Fall Semester 2007 a group of CRC faculty from Humanities, English, Math, and Physical Education worked with CASSL on a pilot study of why students drop classes. From week 4 to week 12 of the semester, students who dropped the classes in the pilot study were called and asked if they would explain why they dropped the class, if they had talked to a teacher, counselor or coach before dropping, if they planned to take the class again, and if there was anything CRC could have done to help them stay in the class. At total of 112 students were called and 44 students were contacted and responded. The following table summarizes the reasons that students gave for dropping a class (Percents add to more than 100% as some students listed multiple reasons for dropping)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for dropping the class</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial problems</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time needed for a social life</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cost of school (fees, books, etc.)</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>didn't have the prerequisites for the class</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schedule wasn't convenient</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transportation problems</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>class didn't fit educational goals</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>health issues</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>family responsibilities</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>class was too hard</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>overall class workload was too large</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teaching methods were not effective</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work responsibilities</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued on p. 4
Anthropology: Anastasia Panagakos and Amanda Wolcott Paskey are researching the effectiveness of hands-on activities in Cultural Anthropology classes. They will complete a classroom based research study and produce a student workbook.

Art: Margaret Woodcock will be working to develop a process of outcomes assessment for creative arts departments. She will gather information and lead her department in implementing strategies for SLO implementation and related planning processes.

Counseling: Lynn Fowler is undertaking a study of why students fail to utilize priority registration times. She will develop statistics that will allow us to better understand this behavior and to find strategies that will help students register in a more effective manner.

English: Matthew Abergel and Linda Sneed are working on research into the effective teaching of writing in non-Composition classes. They will be conducting interviews, focus groups and surveys. The goal is to find ways to support faculty across the college assigning and assessing student writing in their classes.

Library: Marjorie Schreiber will be studying issues related to the impact of textbook costs the ways in which Library Course Reserves could be used to address this problem. She will review what is being done at other colleges and survey CRC students and faculty.

Math: Camille Moreno and Kimberly Williams-Brito are examining the implementation of the “Math Academy” model at CRC. This includes strategies to increase student success in math courses, especially among African American and Latino students.

Radio, TV, and Film Production: BJ Snowden will be exploring the expectations of adult learners as they begin their work as CRC students. He will be conducting a literature review and focus groups to identify effective practices to meet the needs of adult learners at CRC.

Student Government and Leadership: Winnie LaNier is conducting a broad review of existing Leadership programs in community colleges, and how those programs articulate with the CSU and UC systems. The goal is the development of a culturally proficient Leadership program at CRC.

What our colleagues are up to:

CASSL Innovation Grant projects in various disciplines

Notes from the Disciplines

Teaching & Learning Reflections

What Do the Best College Teachers Do?

Francisco C. Rodriguez, CRC President

During the last winter holidays, my son, Andres, got his best set of college grades to date. Finally, I thought, my long-winded father-son lectures about managing his time, improving his study skills and staying focused had taken hold. These themes were surely resonating with him as he matured; it was all now starting to make sense to him. Proud of his success, I asked him what made the difference this time, hoping to receive perhaps a minor nod of affirmation for my previously dispatched pearls of wisdom. His response was clear and immediate, “Dad, I had some really great professors.”

So, what makes a great professor? As I probed my son for clues through our extended conversation, I recognized the behaviors that are descriptive of the best college teachers. The best college teachers are extremely knowledgeable of their discipline, facilitate demanding and intellectually rigorous lectures, discussions and assignments, maintain high expectations for student learning in an environment marked by care and trust, and have in place a systematic feedback loop that allows them to check for learning.

While Andres didn’t describe his experiences using the words I have, he did describe the behaviors of his professors in this way and how positive he felt about being in the class. Through their enthusiasm, his professors made him want to learn and apply the material, in and out of class. As importantly, he became more responsible for his own learning and discovered the joy of it.

Ken Bain, author of, What the Best College Teachers Do, would agree. Bain drew on the experiences and techniques of college and university professors who have been described as “the best.” He discovered that it is not what teachers do, it is what they understand. The best college teachers understand how their students learn, create meaningful assignments, evaluate what they and their students do, and integrate that feedback into future classes. What sets the best teachers apart is a combination of believing that students can succeed, providing challenging activities to demonstrate learning, offering encouragement, and caring to learn about their students as people. The best professors value human learning; they firmly believe that teaching matters and that students can learn.

No matter how sage I believe my advice is to my own son, I cannot compete, nor do I wish to, with his professors’ powerful influence on him and how they make him feel about the process of learning. And they have done so while maintaining high standards of excellence and a high ethic of care. Now that is what I describe as a higher education.

Staff Profile:
Isiah Badrue, Adjunct Business Professor

If you have a chance, spend some time talking to Isiah Badrue, an adjunct business professor here at CRC. He has degrees in engineering and in management, has lived in a variety of countries, has experiences in many cultures and religions, and has found that teaching at the community college is his passion.

Isiah is from Nigeria, where he lived until he was about 18 years old when he left home and traveled to England, France, and Italy to pursue an education. He soon came to US, where he had family members and spoke the language (English is one of the languages commonly spoken in Nigeria). He lived in Maryland, Virginia and Georgia, completed his undergraduate degree in electrical engineering at Devry University’s Atlanta campus and was hired by Intel. He earned a second Masters in Human Resource Management at Golden Gate University here in California.

Recently Isiah began teaching at CRC, where he teaches “Introduction to Business” and “Managing Diversity in the Workplace” and works with the students in the Work Experience program. He teaches similar classes at the Sacramento campus of Devry University as well as one other, quite unexpected, class – Comparative Religions. He was offered a chance to teach that class because of his unusually diverse background – His mother is Christian, his father is a Muslim and many of the people he grew up around in Nigeria practiced the indigenous religions of the area. He feels a connection to all of these viewpoints.

When asked why he wants to make teaching at CRC his career he replies that “All along I knew I wanted to teach. As I was sitting there listening to professors as a student, I thought I’d like to teach. At Intel I was the ‘go to guy’ for training and professional development courses and volunteered to teach those courses. My human resources degree is about helping people. I found that I can do this through education that I have a niche here”. To Isiah, teaching is more than just imparting knowledge about the discipline. He notes that “when I look to the CRC students I realize that I have to do more than just teach them the material; I have to bring with me all the experiences and tools to help them unlock their potential. I work to teach them life lessons as well as the textbook.” He finds himself helping students with resumes, the transfer process, and life in general. He notes that in his job, “the rewards can’t be measured by monetary income, but by being able to touch someone’s life”.

Outcomes Dialogue:
Outcomes Assessment Task Force (OATF), Dana Wassmer
What is Outcomes Assessment?
Outcomes assessment refers to student learning outcomes (or SLOs). It is the process of how we evaluate student success on specific outcomes across the class as a whole. There are many ways this can be done: item analyses of exams, homework, or assignments linked specifically to a SLO, portfolio analyses, capstone projects, rubrics, student surveys, and even direct observation of psychomotor skills. In other words, it is what we have been doing all along, used in a different way.

What Are the Benefits of Outcomes Assessment?
We all want to be the best that we can be. We all want our students to be successful. Outcomes Assessment will assist us in achieving these goals. By reviewing the results of our outcomes assessments, we can begin dialogue with our colleagues on how we can improve the course or lesson or service we provide. This may lead to a change in the curriculum, teaching practices, resources, or staffing. Most importantly, it makes us more effective at what we do.

What is the Outcomes Assessment Task Force?
The Outcomes Assessment Task Force was appointed by the Academic Senate last spring. The committee charge is to develop a set of strategies and tools that can be used to document the assessment of student learning outcomes at the course, program, and college level. Our goal is not to reinvent the wheel nor is it to drastically change the way we currently teach or provide services. We value academic freedom and our campus culture. We strive to develop outcomes assessment strategies and tools that are in support of our values as well as being useful and easy to implement. We realize that many of us are already conducting outcomes assessments. We want to recognize and formalize those efforts.

Who Are We?
Pat Blacklock   Jeanne Edman   Travis Parker
Brad Brazil   Dave Hodapp   Rich Shintaku
Marybeth   Estella Hoskins   Dana Wassmer
Buechner   Kathy McLain   Norv Wellsfry
Cori Burns   Sue Palm   Margaret
Dan DuBray   Woodcock

In other words, we are you. The task force is composed of representatives from management, faculty from a variety of different disciplines, vocational education, research, counseling, and even accreditation. We want to give a voice to your interests and concerns throughout the whole process.
Reasons for dropping were widely distributed over the entire period of the study. For example, work responsibilities impacted students in each of the 8 weeks of the study. The following reasons occurred in at least 5 of the 8 weeks: work responsibilities, teaching methods, overall class workload, health issues, and transportation problems. Only one factor reported by at least 5 students showed a different pattern; students for whom the class did not fit their educational goals dropped before week 6 of the semester. These results, showing that work responsibilities is the most common factor for dropping classes, are similar to those reported previously Sigworth, 1995; Conklin 1997, Summer 2001; Mery, 2001)

A relatively low percentage (16-18%) of the respondents reported class-related reasons for dropping (class too hard, overall class workload for the semester too large, or teaching methods not effective). Another 11% dropped because the class didn’t fit their educational goals. Only 25% of the student respondents indicated that they had spoken with a teacher, counselor or coach before dropping the class. No respondent indicated that the college could have definitely done something to prevent the drop, and only three respondents indicated that "maybe" the college could have done something to help. Approximately 57% of the respondents indicated that they planned to take the class again within the next year.

Examples of some student comments (paraphrased to protect identifying information):
- Teacher didn't teach the way he learned; but "not a bad teacher".
- Didn't want to take public bus that late in the evening. May not need to take the class again
- Work schedule changed - works in retail. Has to choose between work and school; has had to drop all classes
- Respiratory problem, doctor wouldn't clear student for class
- "Great teacher" but couldn't retain info; loud students were distracting. Sad that it didn't work out.
- Death in the family; had to move out of Sacramento
- Took this class as a second choice, but was able to get into the class that was a first choice for student's interests
- Late signing up for classes, class didn't fit schedule, was too early - couldn't wake up
- Sick for a couple of weeks tried to email teacher, but email seemed to be down
- Didn't have the prerequisite; talked to counselor and everything was worked out
- Didn't need the class; signed up for it by mistake
- Spouse took lower paying job, had to go back to work.
- Couldn't understand the professor, the way professor talked and words used.
- Job takes up time frame.
- Parents separating so needed to work full time to help mother with household finances
- Got the flu and got too far behind
- Works full time and had to drop classes "situations always pop up" at student's house.
- Couldn't afford all the books, had to drop 3 classes
- Took Math and English in same semester - too much
- Student was promoted and is now working 12 hour days.
- Bookstore ran out of book. Was falling behind from the beginning. Homework was excessive.
- Student was behind; 3 hours is too long
- Commute was too long
- Had to leave the state
- Stressed out, couldn't keep up. Financial Aid issues
- Didn't like teacher; didn't think the grading was fair.
- Construction going on in house, family had to move to a motel that was far away.
- Turned in two papers and got bad grades on them; didn't see the point of continuing.
- Didn't like the class, too much reading

References