

Sacramento State COSA Final Report – Compass Pilots

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Introduction: The following report outlines the practices and findings of a three-year project beginning with a cohort of Spring 2012 community college completers transferring to a four-year university. The project engaged students, faculty, and staff at both institutions, in designing and implementing a cross-institutional strategy. The elements of the initiative were intended to facilitate transfer and to bridge the spaces—physical and conceptual—from the community college to the university. As is to be expected, some elements of the project needed to be modified over time, and at the time of this report, our analysis is incomplete as the cohorts in the project are still in progress toward degree. Additionally, several components of the project proved to be impossible to implement due to institutional constraints discussed below. Those institutional constraints resulted in alternative strategies and provided the basis for a new initiative related to first time transfer students at Sacramento State.

1. **Main Objectives and Intended Outcomes:** The key objectives were to create a series of structures that would assist students in meeting Sac State Graduation and upper division General Education requirements effectively and efficiently with the first two semesters of enrollment at Sacramento State. The project designers planned to:
 - a. Create an e-portfolio platform to document student learning aligned with the LEAP and Lumina DQP constructs before, during, and after transfer;
 - b. Build transfer student’s deep awareness of Sacramento State’s Baccalaureate Learning Goals and the Lumina Degree Qualifications Profile in relation to students’ individual talents and interests;
 - c. Provide an integrated, coherent opportunity for students to broaden and deepen their intellectual and academic capacities for in their upper division GE and for fulfilling university requirements (GWAR certification, GE/GR).
 - d. Provide an integrated GE experience designed to stimulate students to search for connections between the goals of Liberal Education and their particular disciplinary goals;

2. **Progress toward achieving the objectives:** During the three years of the project, the implementation team addressed of the objectives in 1 above with varying degrees of success. Over the three years of the project, the team met regularly, reviewed incremental progress, made adjustments to the program as the realities of the contexts required. The e-portfolio system, referred to here as “the nested folio system” was designed and two elements of the three element system were field tested with first time community and state college enrollees, three cohorts of community college transfers and various other Sacramento State students enrolled in courses designated as meeting General Education or Graduation Requirements. Instructors of three courses designated as meeting General Education and Graduation Requirements modified their courses to create an interdisciplinary Transfer Learning Collaborative (TLC) and were prepared to teach the COSA cohorts, and to use the third component of the nested portfolio, however the constraints of scheduling both at the level of

the department and at the level of the student did not support either a fully cohorted TLC, particularly in year two. It was impossible to implement a transfer seminar—one of the objectives initially conceived as a way to achieve the goals of the project--- at the community college and an intermediate action, the creation of a transfer club, served as the avenue for recruiting and supporting the three cohorts in transfer.

3. **Main accomplishments:** The project was successful in several ways, including 1) focusing attention on the potential for facilitating transfer via creating both an ethos of transfer at the community college and the gaps in the sending and receiving structures (admissions/outreach) related to GE and GR requirements facing students upon transfer; 2) development of a nested portfolio system that shows clear promise for implementation at an institutional level; 3) implementation and field testing of a structure for evaluating and assessing preparation for enrollment in an advanced writing course—a Graduation Requirement—and demonstrating the feasibility of placement by portfolio in lieu of a timed exam; and 4) evidence of the value of “transfer friendly” upper division GE courses tailored to transfer students.

4. **The project’s scope** changed somewhat due to the institutional factors already noted. We went to a “club” approach at the Community College because of the “turf” dispute in creating a seminar. We scaled down the Transfer Learning Collaboratives because of the challenges in designating a TLC both at department level (probably because of the challenging times vis a vis enrollment) and because the varying requirements for each major were sufficiently different as to make cohorting infeasible. The project did scale up from one community college to two, almost doubling the yield from 14 in the first year to 27 in the 3rd year.

5. **Progress toward outcomes.**
 - a. The project did develop a Nested Portfolio System, successfully testing the concept, proving that the placement process was viable (valid and reliable as well) and that it did assist students in completing Upper Division GE within the first year of enrollment
 - b. The Fall 2012 cohort (1st cohort) 60 % of the students completed all 9 units of Upper Division GE during their first 2 semester at Sac State. . 35% of that cohort graduated in Spring 14; the remainder are on track for a Fall 14 graduation. The remainder of the cohorts are not far enough along in progress to comment. Cohort 2’s progress is hampered because they lacked a cohorted TLC. The retention rate for the first two cohorts is 96% with only one person withdrawing. Matched comparison data analysis has not taken place, and traditional graduation metrics are 4 and 6 year. The first cohort’s graduation rate of 35% after 2 years and the projected remainder is encouraging but not conclusive.
 - c. Student **learning** is a trickier algorithm to track without a matched sample, something our current “fellow” is focused on. Our first cohort of students were tracked into three courses, two of which were focused on writing. Grades are a very soft measure of learning, however, it should be noted that 66% of the students earned a grade of A- or

higher in their Writing Intensive course(s). What was somewhat surprising to note that the evidence of student learning with respect to written communication PRIOR to transfer was as robust as it was. Again, lacking comparison data with the timed test, the anecdotal evidence of the readers---the same evaluators reviewed placement tests and COSA placement portfolios---indicated that transfer students were reasonably well prepared for advanced writing courses. Further analysis of the items included showed that the evidence students put forward of their writing abilities were drawn from non-English Comp courses and many included evidence of research---informed literacy in addition to critical thinking and written communication. This is a key finding that counteracts the traditional stereotype of community college learning that is often considered less robust than that of it's 4 year counterpart.

6. **Project sustainability:** This project was designed specifically to test concepts and constructions that would be sustainable beyond the funding. Each element of the project has found some traction in some part of both institutions, though the community college continues to be more delayed in taking robust part---something that is likely to change following the recent MOU between the University, Cosumnes River College and the Elk Grove Unified School District focused specifically on pathways to higher education signed in September 2014 and the Chancellor's Office grant awarded to the partnership in the previous year focused on the Common Core Learning Outcomes.
 - a. Transfer Facilitation including recruitment, portfolio preparation, evaluation and a TLC course in the first two semesters will continue, with funding provided by the Chancellor's Office Student Success Grants, institutional support for the eFolio and the "holding aside" a section of advanced writing for those students.
 - b. It is not likely that the original plan to have an interdisciplinary TLC of three courses will occur without significant change in the mechanisms of course offering and finance. As long as the departments control the GE and Grad Required courses as part of their overall offerings, they will make scheduling decisions that are in their own best interests. Similarly, without the institutional support of CRC to begin using the nested portfolio system with their own first year seminars, the likelihood that the culture of transfer and the development of portfolio thinking will make the transfer facilitation project as robust as it could be is diminished.
 - c. The Faculty Senate is expected to vote on providing the option of portfolio to satisfy the first part of the GVAR during the 2014/15 year. The Nested Porfolio System has been adopted as a pilot project and has been used as an element in several grant applications. 22 faculty and staff attended a recent "teach-in" and approximately 20 sections of students will begin to use one or another portion of the system, ideally the Base.
7. **Scalability of the project**
 - a. The Transfer Facilitation Project using the WPJ placement portfolio could easily be scaled up to include all of the Los Rios transfer students. Doubling the recruitment ended up in doubling the yield, and with a large cohort, it might be easier to identify Writing Intensive Courses that could be held out for more groups.
 - b. We believe that this project may be duplicated at other insitutions, particularly those where there is a placement moment for which incoming transfer students may prepare.

8. **Lessons learned:** Certainly hindsight is “20:20.” However, one does not have the opportunity to wish away the realities of the landscape(s) and the institutional cultures. We sought to engage those with the power to influence and we used the ecology of the institutions to leverage our initiatives.
- a. The project’s outcomes could have been more effectively mapped had we designed the evaluation system at the outset and analyzed data along the way. Also, identifying and using the campus student communication systems and having a web presence/Facebook/twitter etc. might have made recruitment more robust.
 - b. The fact that the two major partners were colleagues with a long history of working together made the partnership—however tenuous it was due to institutional challenges—work at all is a key issue. In fact, the TLC faculty with the strongest commitment also taught courses at the community college. The community college perspective was key to much of the success of the project. And, in fact, the aspects of the project that were the most challenging might have been mitigated earlier by attention to those perspectives. Transfer students need a much higher touch than is considered usual for a 4-year student. More and more frequent outreach during the times of day and week that transfer students are available would have increased participation. Also more information earlier about the TLC course would have both eased concern and perhaps resulted in higher enrollment in the TLC. Holding the TLC in the evening, on a Friday/Saturday or for longer times (3hours once a week) might make a difference. Each of these variations is challenged by the specific schedules of the TLC instructor and the vagaries of the departments scheduling the courses.
 - c. As noted above, the challenges included a lack of insight as to what Transfer Students want and need to be successful. Additionally, the structures supporting transfer at both institutions have serious deficits having to do with staffing and training. The outreach resources at Sacramento State need to be made more robust and comprehensive and need to be in sync with the Transfer Facilitation Project. Students reported receiving erroneous and conflicting information from other programs and that may have led to some early attrition. It certainly required time and explanation. The transfer structures at CRC are not as well developed, particularly insofar as preparing students for the actual requirements of the post transfer process. Student’s were/are surprised to know of graduation requirements like World Language, GVAR, Race and Ethnicity, and the GVAR placement.
 - d. Recommendations for Practice: We recommend a twice a year Transfer Summit with all the stakeholders from the Los Rios and Sacramento State; a yearly mandatory joint “training” for outreach and transfer counselors; We also recommend a more consistent set of pre-transfer workshops that build in the direct instruction on portfolio thinking at the community college that would begin in the FY Seminar, and be carried forward via workshops (carrying extra credit, perhaps in academic courses) and consistent times and spaces to carry out Transfer Facilitation Project activities, perhaps like the “one spot” service centers at Sac State. We also recommend that the President and Provost offer a “purpose prize” to develop upper division GE TLCs that are centrally funded and commissioned from a yet to be established College of General Studies funded directly by Academic Affairs. We recommend that the Sacramento State schedule of courses include a robust proportion of courses offered in the evenings, on weekends, and in formats that would permit more infrequent but sustained instruction; perhaps permitting students to enroll in more courses per semester in more efficient ways.

- e. Recommendations for Policy at Sac State and the CSU: We recommend that the Faculty Senate adopt the WPJ folio review process as meeting the part 1 of the GWAR. We recommend that the Chancellor's Office offer a waiver program to Sacramento State and Lost Rios students for completing upper division GE in an experimental pilot project that would be structured as above. We recommend that the Faculty Senate adopt the Nested Portfolio System as meeting the learning outcomes of the Baccalaureate Learning Goals and GE in particular and pilot the use of the system for a 6-year period.

- 9. Additional Information and Future Work:** This work generated a number of artifacts including regular reports, conference presentations, doctoral studies, and other materials created to showcase the project progress and accomplishments. Additionally the Nested Portfolio System developed by Dr. Terry Underwood and field-tested by he and Drs. Hecsh and Arnaud using the myeFolio platform and the monograph authored by Dr. Underwood may be useful materials to others with interest in folio thinking and direct instruction related to the concept. Finally, there is a set of reviewer feedback forms on WPJ process from June 2014 awaiting analysis. The analysis of the data from this project will continue to be collected for the first three cohorts in terms of retention and graduation.
- 10. Concluding Remarks:** This work would not have been possible without the steadfast support of the Dean of Undergraduate Studies, Dr. Sheree Meyer; the persistent challenges of Dr. Terry Underwood, principal designer of the Nested Portfolio System; and the boots on the ground at Cosumnes River College made possible by Dr. Robert Snowden. Many other students—Mylene Ycmat and Dorian Love, in particular—permitted us to showcase their work and shared their insights and suggestions with us over the three years of this pilot. Thanks also to the TLC instructors Dr. Sherrie Carinci, Jeannie Gazzaniga-Moolu and Dr. Hellen Lee for your initial work on this project and to Dr. Christine Bellon for writing the first drafts of this plan way back when. Finally, thanks to all the folks in the Student Advising Center and to the Transfer Orientation folks who made the transition to college work for our CRC and Sac City students.

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