

CENTRAL OREGON
community college



Basic Skills Core Theme

CORE THEME 3: BASIC SKILLS

Standard 3.B – Planning in Basic Skills

As with other core themes, [Board goals](#)¹ and [priorities](#)² have helped shape the core theme of basic skills. The Board goal that students will “have academic achievements and basic learning skills necessary to successfully pursue education at the community college level” is reflected in this core theme, as are the Board priorities of access and success. Together, they emphasize the need to connect with the Central Oregon residents who seek more advanced education, but who lack the basic skills needed to be successful. The primary programs and services supporting the basic skills core theme are the Adult Basic Skills program (Adult Basic Education, English Language Learners, High School Completion, and GED Preparation), math department (emphasis on developmental math classes), and humanities department (emphasis on developmental reading and writing courses).

Standard 4.A – Assessment in Basic Skills

Two objectives motivate planning and assessment for this core theme and each of these objectives also relates to one or more Board priorities.

- 3.1 Students who began at the basic skills, English Language Learner, or the post-secondary remedial level will be able to succeed in college level courses.**
- 3.2 Students progressing in Adult Basic Skills will demonstrate momentum by attaining foundational skills in writing and mathematics.**

The board priorities that relate to this core theme—access and success—are evident in the discussion of specific objectives and indicators.

Data for the basic skills core theme are derived from the following sources:

- COCC enrollment data
- Strategic Enrollment Management data
- Program-specific data from the Tracking of Programs and Students (TOPS) system a federal Adult Basic Skills data collection system
- State of Oregon’s Adult Basic Skills (ABS) Program Review process

These sources provide the institution with historical and current data on student progression, success, and course completion, all of which are critical to the evaluation of the core theme objectives and associated programs and services.

Assessment of Programs and Services

Programs and services that support the basic skills core theme use data from the sources named above to evaluate program effectiveness following this assessment model: (1) desired outcomes are established, (2) methods of achieving the outcomes are determined, (3) progress toward achievement

of outcomes is evaluated regularly using quantitative and qualitative data, and (4) changes are made as needed for improved outcomes. Responsibility for planning and assessment is held within each service unit, and where credit classes or programs are involved, faculty play the central role. Specific examples of assessment and improvement among programs and services are described with each objective.

Assessment of Student Achievement

Student progression through Adult Basic Skills and developmental courses is central to the basic skills core theme. Assessing student achievement at the various levels is critical to COCC's commitment to student success.

Adult Basic Skills

COCC's Adult Basic Skills (ABS) programs—Adult Basic Education (ABE), Adult Secondary Education (ASE), English Language Learners (ELL) and Adult High School Diploma (AHSD)—use the state of Oregon [Indicators of Program Quality](#)³ (IPQ) as ABS program outcomes. These outcomes include indicators focused on eight areas— (1) program administration, (2) student recruitment, (3) orientation, (4) assessment for accountability and instruction, (5) student retention, (6) transition and completion, (7) support services, and (8) instruction—and serve as a long-term planning framework. As part of this long-term analysis, Oregon ABS programs are required to annually assess their progress toward IPQ outcomes through the Title II Strategic Framework tool. In addition to this work, ABS administration and instructors are currently developing institution-specific program outcomes. COCC's ABS programs have also established individual course outcomes based on the [state of Oregon's ABS Learning Standards](#)⁴ benchmarks.

Adult Basic Skills course and program outcomes were reported on as part of the institution's ABS program review (April 2011) and serve as critical elements to achievement of the basic skills core theme objectives. While the formal report from the state of Oregon was not available at the time of this writing, initial recommendations include:

- Update curriculum in all ABS areas to provide consistency among course sections
- Standardize student orientation among instructors and locations
- Provide instructor training on the use of Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) test scores to inform instruction
- Increase the intensity and duration of ABS classroom instruction across the District

Developmental Math and Writing

While all COCC credit-bearing courses have established course outcomes, particular to the basic skills core theme are those associated with credit-level [math](#)⁵ and [writing](#)⁶. The outcomes are available on individual department websites, on the College's [course outcomes](#)⁷ website, and on all course syllabi.

COCC's full-time math faculty develop course outcomes with input from adjunct and part-time faculty. Generally, the full-time faculty members who teach the predominant number of course sections author the initial course outcomes. The full department then works as a team to revise and finalize outcomes. With the exception of Math 60 and 65, assessment of student achievement of course outcomes generally happens through the final exam. Based on this assessment, instructors modify their teaching methods to better address student learning as related to the outcomes. In Math 60 and 65, instructors

teach the same material on the same timeline during the quarter. Because of this, as well as the software supporting these two classes, progress toward course outcomes is now evaluated during the term, providing faculty the opportunity to address learning gaps before the course ends.

Approximately 15 years ago, COCC's full-time tenure track instructors in humanities restructured developmental reading and writing classes from separate to integrated courses. These new courses, WR 60 and 65, focus on reading and writing as closely-integrated skills and teach students writing and essay development techniques needed for success in college-level courses. A third developmental class, WR 95, provides an opportunity for students who have placed into WR 121 but feel unready for it, or have passed WR 65, but desire additional practice before taking college-level writing. Department faculty (including full-time, adjunct, and part-time) re-wrote the outcomes and associated assignments to clearly integrate writing and reading skills. More recently, the state of Oregon writing faculty moved to four-credit writing courses and agreed to common outcomes for college-level writing classes. COCC adopted those outcomes, which required further adjustment of WR 65 outcomes. The Developmental Education Committee, composed of instructors who regularly teach WR 60, 65, and 95, is responsible for assessing and updating developmental reading and writing course outcomes as needed.

Within the humanities department, student learning is assessed throughout the term with assignments connected to specific course outcomes. Many instructors also incorporate end-of-term student projects in which students demonstrate achievement of multiple course outcomes. Feedback from these assessment tools allows individual faculty to adjust teaching methods to improve student success.

Standard 4.B – Improvement in Basic Skills

In the following pages, tables illustrate the systems through which COCC evaluates its achievement in the core theme of basic skills. As with all core themes, improvement in each of the objectives is identified and tracked using specific indicators. Data within these tables is summarized with commentary below, followed by a discussion of actions taken to maintain or improve progress toward core theme objectives.





Assessment is done on an ongoing basis, with faculty members making improvements at the assignment and course levels, and departments making larger curricular and program adjustments. Details as they relate to each objective are provided below. Results of these assessments are provided to various groups throughout the year, including regular reports to the COCC Board of Directors (Institutional Effectiveness data, CCSSE and SEM reports), to the state of Oregon's Office of Community Colleges and Workforce Development (TOPS reporting), and to the campus community (accreditation self-study, Institutional Effectiveness data, CCSSE and Graduate Surveys, SEM reports).

Objective 3.1: Students who began at the basic skills, English Language Learner, or the post-secondary remedial level will be able to succeed in college level courses.

For a comprehensive community college such as COCC, student success at all levels is critical to the institution's mission and is a fundamental aspect of Board goals and priorities. As such, this objective focuses on student progression through and success in discrete Adult Basic Skills (ABS) programs,

student progression to credit-level coursework, and student success for those testing into developmental levels. Data from these indicators, as well as from the ABS self-study, serve as critical tools for evaluating institutional success in this objective. Data findings and subsequent actions are summarized below.

Table 4.11: Indicators, benchmarks, status, score, and source of data for Objective 3.1, Core Theme 3: Basic Skills

Indicator	Benchmark		2009-10	Score	Source
	Yellow	Green	Status		
3.1.a: ELL students successfully complete all ELL levels	10%	12%	9%		Title II TOPS Data
3.1.b: ABE level students successfully complete ABE level	20%	25%	22%		Title II TOPS Data
3.1.c: Adult Secondary Education (ASE) level students successfully complete six or more credits in one year	10%	15%	13%		COCC Enrollment Data
3.1.d: First term success rates of students testing into developmental writing and math	60%	70%	63%		SEM Data Fall 2009 cohort

Summary of Data for Objective 3.1

Data associated with the above indicators demonstrate that COCC is doing well in helping students progress through Adult Basic Education (ABE) levels as well as successfully completing credit-bearing courses. Twenty-two percent of ABE students have successfully completed ABE level courses, and 13% of Adult Secondary Education (ASE) students successfully completed six or more credits in a year. Additionally, the College is meeting its goal regarding first-term success for students testing into developmental levels: 63% of students testing into developmental writing or math passed their classes during their first term.

However, TOPS data indicates that the College is not yet meeting its internal benchmark for student progression through English Language Learner courses, falling one percentage point short of the benchmark. Similarly, ABS administration uses TOPS data to track student retention (identified as students transitioning from ELL to ABE) to best determine appropriate interventions. This data, coupled with findings from the ABS self-study, indicate that additional work is needed to see continued improvement for indicator 3.1.a.

Overall, the College is meeting its benchmark regarding (ASE) student participation in credit-bearing courses. While this indicator measures ASE students regardless of their majors, the College reviewed additional data by academic program to better identify specific attrition points. This review concluded that many students beginning in COCC's automotive and manufacturing programs were not able to meet program math requirements and were therefore not completing these programs.

In regard to the success rate of new, first-time freshman who test into developmental levels, COCC's Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Committee found that success rates differed among students who tested into one developmental education subject (math or writing) and students who tested into

two developmental subjects (math and writing). Feedback from various groups across the campus suggested that students testing into developmental levels in both writing and math should be the primary focus due to the larger number of students who could be positively affected by specific initiatives. As indicated by the data, the College is meeting its benchmark in this area.

Actions taken to support assessment results for Objective 3.1

Recognizing that the College is meeting many of its benchmarks for objective 3.1, but wanting to see additional, aspirational gains, COCC made the following foundational changes to support the basic skills core theme objectives and programs:

- A Transitional Studies Task Force was convened to identify strategies in developmental courses to best support core elements of the basic skills core theme. This group includes representatives from credit faculty (math, writing, and other disciplines), instructional administration, ABS administration, student services, and the SEM Team.
- For many years, ABS programs reported to the dean responsible for Community Learning and COCC's Redmond campus. While this was appropriate at the time, it was also recognized that having the ABS program report to the same instructional administration as math and writing would provide more continuity and improved collaboration among ABS faculty, developmental education faculty, and college-level writing and math faculty. Thus, oversight for ABS programs shifted to the credit-level instructional deans in summer 2011.
- COCC is providing training (spring 2012) to ABS instructors on developing consistent course and program outcomes, to be ready in 2012-13. Although the ABS program works under the outcomes set by the state of Oregon, the work of ABS instructors this spring will allow for greater consistency among course outcomes, hours of instruction, and orientation processes. It will also refine strategies to increase student success and progression.
- Current ABS coursework is taught in a multi-level format where students from various skill levels participate in the same class. To improve ELL and ABE student progression and align with best practices, the ABS program adopted Oregon Pathways to Adult Basic Skills (OPABS), which allows instructors to focus on specific skill levels within each course.

Many of the above actions relate directly to COCC's Adult Basic Skills programs, but the College also used the data to direct developmental math and writing initiatives in support of this core theme. Most recently, COCC's math department identified the [National Center for Academic Transformation's](#)⁸ course redesign concept as a best practice strategy to increase student access to and success in developmental math classes, targeting this instructional methodology toward Math 60 and 65. Under this model, students split their time between standard in-class instruction and time in a dedicated math lab. To support this initiative, the College dedicated the resources needed to remodel two classrooms into math labs and purchase needed hardware and software. Math 60 redesign was implemented in winter 2011 and Math 65 in spring 2011.

Transitioning to a software-supported model (Hawkes Learning System) required math faculty to revise their current curriculum. A team of full-time math faculty was supported by the Office of Instruction to




work on math redesign during winter and summer breaks in order to revise curriculum and to define a weekly lecture and lab schedule that included specific topics, outcomes, assessments, and exams. Due to the implementation of this department effort, all sections of Math 60 and 65 (post-secondary remedial algebra) remain synchronized on the same schedule during the term. All faculty—part-time and full-time—agree to teach the same topics in any given week, and Hawkes software standardizes practice activities and exam questions (although students can work at their own pace). These new controls also signify a shift in how math faculty formulate pedagogy and topic selection in the lecture components of Math 60 and Math 65. Math faculty have already begun to formulate questions for data-based discussions about particular areas in algebra that may require additional attention and potential teaching adjustments. Faculty will do so with confidence that the data set is valid since the Math 60 and 65 experiences are consistent both in outcomes and assessments across all course sections.

Similarly, COCC's Humanities faculty use assessment to support student success. As an example, shortly after development of WR 60 and 65, student feedback indicated a need for additional opportunities to build writing skills prior to beginning WR 121. In response, faculty developed WR 95. This course has essentially the same outcomes as WR 65, but with a primary focus on writing rather than reading and writing combined. Additionally, when COCC enrollment and student success data indicated a need to adjust course scheduling to better align with student needs, specifically regarding additional WR 95 sections, the department adjusted course schedules to meet this demand.

Objective 3.2: Students progressing in Adult Basic Skills will demonstrate momentum by attaining foundational skills in writing and mathematics.

Similar to objective 3.1, this objective also focuses on Adult Basic Skills student progression, but with an emphasis on matriculation to and success in credit-bearing courses. Many institutional programs, services, and initiatives supporting this objective are detailed in objective 3.1, although additional data and subsequent actions are provided below.

Table 4.12: Indicators, benchmarks, status, score, and source of data for Objective 3.2, Core Theme 3: Basic Skills

Indicator	Benchmark		Status	Score	Source
	Yellow	Green			
3.2.a: Enrollment of ABS students to WR 60 or MTH 10 will increase annually.	+2%	+5%	+2%		COCC Enrollment Data 2008-09 to 2009-10
3.2.b: Enrollment of students who began at ABS levels, successfully completed WR 60 (or higher) or Math 10 (or higher).	+2%	+3%	+2%		
3.2.c: Enrollment of students who began at ABS levels, successfully completed WR 60 (or higher) or Math 10 (or higher), and who have progressed to college level will increase annually.	+2%	+5%	+1%		

Summary of Data for Objective 3.2

Student progression and success in credit courses is improving, with two of the three indicators meeting the yellow benchmark level. As the effects of the many ABS program changes are realized (reporting structure, institution-specific outcomes, responses to state program review, alignment of support services), the College anticipates greater increases in student progression and success and will continue to monitor progress.

From 2008-09 to 2009-10, the percentage of students who began at ABS levels, successfully completed developmental writing or math, and progressed to college-level courses increased by 1% (from 9% to 10%); however, this did not meet the minimum College benchmark of 2%, likely due to the newness of initiatives affecting this objective. It is expected that performance toward this indicator will increase as ABS and developmental-level curriculum initiatives and partnerships are implemented.

Actions taken to support assessment results for Objective 3.2

Actions such as creating the Transitional Studies Task Force, realigning the reporting structures, and applying for state grants serve as the solid foundation needed to make progress for this core theme. In addition, several other initiatives support progress toward fulfillment of this objective. The first of these initiatives, the Oregon Pathways for Adult Basic Skills Transition to Education and Work Initiative (OPABS), embeds career and college awareness curriculum into ABS coursework (initial pilot, fall 2011), with the goal of increasing ABS student post-secondary aspirations, providing students with information to best understand the “getting started” steps, and increasing awareness of certificate and degree programs.

Secondly, while the career and college awareness curriculum helps students understand post-ABS pathways, a grant from the Partnership to End Poverty (local non-profit focused on eliminating poverty) provides an opportunity for ABS students to receive college credit while building ABS math skills in a learning community model (pilot, spring 2012). This model includes having students in ABE math participate in credit-bearing developmental writing, college success, and career exploration classes. State of Oregon funding does not provide adequate financial resources needed to support ABS programs. While COCC has relatively few grant-funded programs, the need to provide greater support for basic skills programs was readily apparent. As a result of dedicated grant efforts, COCC received a 2011 State Career Pathways grant and participates in a statewide Credential Acceleration and Support for Employment (CASE) grant. Both grants are designed to integrate math with content-specific learning, support student progression in basic skills areas, and improve opportunities for employment. COCC dedicated its portion of these grants to redesigning the math curriculum associated with the automotive and manufacturing programs and to hiring a career coach to work with ABS and credit students in career development and job search. This program will include both ABS and credit faculty.

Endnotes

- ¹ Board goals: <http://visitors.cocc.edu/About/Mission/default.aspx>
- ² Board priorities: <http://visitors.cocc.edu/About/Mission/Priorities/Default.aspx>
- ³ Indicators of program quality: <http://www.oregon.gov/CCWD/ABE/index.shtml>
- ⁴ Oregon ABS learning standards: <http://oregonabslearningstandards.org/>
- ⁵ Math course objectives: http://math.cocc.edu/Degrees_Competerencies/Math+Objectives/default.aspx
- ⁶ Writing outcomes: <http://humanities.cocc.edu/UserData/Documents/humanities/Writingoutcomes.pdf>
- ⁷ Course outcomes: <http://assessment.cocc.edu/instr/course/default.aspx>
- ⁸ National Center for Academic Transformation: <http://www.thencat.org/index.html>