



California Acceleration Project

Supporting California's 112 Community Colleges
To Redesign their English and Math Curricula
And Increase Student Completion

<http://cap.3csn.org>

Instructional Design Principles¹

Backwards design from college-level courses:

We argue that to be “ready” for a college-level course in English or math, students need practice and guidance in *the same things that these courses require*. Developmental courses in English and math should look and feel pretty much like good college-level courses – similar content, similar tasks – but with an understanding that students might need more in-class support and guidance than better-prepared students.

Relevant, thinking-oriented curriculum

We believe that under-prepared students are best served by rigorous engagement with issues that matter – curricula that ask them to wrestle with open-ended problems and use resources from the class to reach their own conclusions. Our assignments should both invite – and help to develop – students’ sense of themselves as having something to contribute, a sense of their own agency.

Just-in-time remediation

In our classrooms, just-in-time remediation takes place on an as-needed basis as students grapple with challenging college-level tasks. For example, grammar guidance occurs in response to students’ writing as they learn to edit their own work. A review of relevant arithmetic or algebra grows out of students analyzing data to answer an intellectually engaging question.

Low-stakes, collaborative practice

When teachers ask under-prepared students to do challenging, college-level assignments, they need to build in a lot of opportunities for practice. Students need space to grapple with ideas, try out new vocabulary, see how other students approach tasks, and receive targeted guidance from the teacher. Low-stakes collaborative practice should focus on meaningful high-priority skills that are well-aligned with graded assessments.

Intentional support for students’ affective needs

Students are placed into remedial courses based upon tests of their math, grammar, and reading comprehension skills. But teachers often find that – while students’ skills may need work – the bigger issue is whether they come to class consistently, complete the assigned homework, show up for tests, and turn in their papers. As teachers, we’ve seen that when we understand the emotional dynamics behind self-sabotaging behaviors, we are much better able to help students stay on track. We believe the answer does not lie outside our classrooms, in add-on success courses or early alert warnings from counseling, but in the fabric of how we teach – our interactions with students, class activities, grading, and policies.

¹ Summary excerpted from “Toward a Vision of Accelerated Curriculum & Pedagogy: High Challenge, High Support Classrooms for Under-Prepared Students,” by Katie Hern, in conversation with Myra Snell. Forthcoming monograph, 2013. LearningWorks: Oakland, CA.