Center for Urban Education
Rossier School of Education,
University of Southern California

California Benchmarking Project
Enhancing Institutional Effectiveness and Equity

**Los Angeles Southwest College (LASC)**
**Math Sub-Committee**
**Syllabus Reflection Exercise**
**Summary of Findings & Contextualizing Solutions**

Team members reviewed 7 math syllabi from the basic skills courses (Math 105, Math 112, and Math 115) The reflection exercise involved reviewing course syllabi for clarity, completeness and equity-consciousness from the perspective of a student enrolled in a basic skills course. It reveals how a standard course document can reflect a commitment to student-centered learning, and serve as an instrument that promotes equity-consciousness in teaching practices.

**Summary of Findings and Suggestions for Change**

| Math Syllabi Reflection Data | Suggestions for Future Inquiry & Recommendations for Change |
|---|---|
| **Policies & Objectives**<br>*-Course Objectives/Description:*<br>• Most syllabi lacked inclusion of course description or objectives. Or, if listed they did not match course outlines & campus catalog of classes.<br>• SLO's not included on any syllabi reviewed<br><br>*-Instructor Accessibility:*<br>• Only 1 out of 7 syllabi included information on instructor's office hours<br><br>*-Course Topics:*<br>• Generally, chapters and listings of assignments are presented but w/o topic headers for students to follow (e.g., chapter and page numbers are listed only)<br>• Several syllabi do not list course readings or homework assignments<br><br>*-Grading Policies:*<br>• Generally, formulas for how students' course grade will be calculated are included. Tests and homework assignments are generally outlined. However, several of the syllabi have formulas that are difficult to calculate. | **Policies & Objectives** |

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- "Hard-line" testing policies (e.g. no make-up tests are allowed for any reason)

*-College Academic Policies:*

- Most of the syllabi include all the information the college expects to be listed. Thus, "complete but lacking encouragement".
- One syllabi states students will be held to the college's code of "academic integrity," but no mention of what this entails.
- Several state an absentee policy (2 absences and student maybe dropped) that is inconsistent with campus policy

*-Feedback:*

- Most syllabi provide information on when tests are given. However, few discuss the different ways and how often students will receive feedback on their progress and from instructor.

*-Support Services:*

- None of the syllabi include information on how students can use the math lab, student learning center, or services for students with disabilities
- Text book access (no mention of if texts are provided on-reserve in library or info about book grants)

*-Tone:*

- Tone generally seems more "punitive" than encouraging
- Focus is more on consequences and than encouragement.

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| Math Syllabi Reflection Data | Suggestions for Future Inquiry & Recommendations for Change |
|---|---|
| **Equity Conscious Practices**<br><br>*-Communication of High Expectations:*<br>• No mention of collaborative efforts between students, peers and instructors to ensure students success.<br>• Success generally described in terms of excelling in exams – little mention of class participation, collaborative projects, etc.<br>• "Finishing listed chapters is goal of class…broader goal for students not implied" (e.g., what skills class will provide student for college success, transfer and skills for future employment)<br>• Class participation expectations not described or encouraged<br><br>*-Rigorous Learning Activities:*<br>• The various instructional techniques and resources for classroom learning is not mentioned<br>• How course connects to higher-order thinking skills and critical thinking is not discussed<br><br>*-Consideration of Students' Needs and Aspirations:*<br>• No mention of assistance in developing student's study skills<br>• No mention of resource outlets on campus (transfer, library assistance, math lab, counseling or tutoring)<br>• No mention of how class will benefit student's future academic goals or transfer requirements | **Equity Conscious Practices** |

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| *-Connection to Students' Cultural/Historical Backgrounds:*<br>• Unclear how to make content connects to students' socio-cultural realities.<br><br>*-Promotion of Academic Transformation & Empowerment:*<br>Unclear how instructor will encourage students to develop skills and values that help them become reflective thinkers and social critics via syllabi. | _____<br>_____<br>_____<br>_____<br>_____<br>_____<br>_____ |

| Math Syllabi Reflection Data | Suggestions for Future Inquiry & Recommendations for Change |
|---|---|
| **Benefits of Syllabi Reflection Exercise**<br><br>*-Need to be more student-centered:*<br>• "If I were a student… I would feel from the syllabus that I was irrelevant to the class. It appears to be text-book driven with little attention to either student or teach. The element of encouragement is totally lacking, though it is an element that I had never considered previously."<br>• The lesson I learned from this exercise is how we as faculty must view a syllabus from a student's perspective…once we get their attention we must utilize various tools and techniques to incorporate various learning styles into the classroom"<br><br>*-Benefits of cross-staff communication:*<br>• Helpful to have counselors and math faculty discuss different perspectives of student success and barriers in order to generate a more holistic approach to best practices in the classroom | **Benefits of Syllabi Reflection Exercise**<br><br>_____<br>_____<br>_____<br>_____<br>_____<br>_____<br>_____<br>_____<br>_____<br>_____<br>_____<br>_____<br>_____<br>_____<br>_____<br>_____ |

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