THE REPORT OF THE NONCREDIT ALIGNMENT PROJECT:
A LEARNER-CENTERED CURRICULUM FOR ALL STUDENTS

INFORMATION ITEM

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Issue

This item presents The Report of the Noncredit Alignment Project: A Learner-Centered Curriculum for All Students that summarizes the conclusions of a yearlong study on how to strengthen the alignment between community college credit and noncredit programs and services, with the goal of increasing access to lifelong learning and improving the transition of adult learners to a career, college and civic life. The report is being presented to the Board of Governors as an information item.

Background

Subsequent to the January 2005 staff report, Noncredit Instruction: A Portal to the Future, the Board of Governors approved funds for a consulting contract to conduct a study on how to strengthen the articulation and alignment of noncredit instruction with career-technical education and transfer instructional programs in the California Community Colleges.

It was intended that the study build on the work, An Aspiration for Excellence: Review of the System Office (2004), and that the results inform the future work of the System Strategic Plan. Research, assessment, facilitated field-based input groups and a review of the literature were the methods to be used in this study, and conclusions were to be presented in a final report on or before January 2007.

Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education leadership funds were used to support the contract. Based on a competitive bid, the consulting firm of Morrison Forbes was awarded the contract. Morrison Forbes began their work on the Noncredit Alignment Project in June 2005.
Research Framework

For the purpose of this study, “alignment” refers to organizational system alignment. Organizational or system alignment occurs when the strategic goals and organizational culture are mutually supportive, and when the key components of an organization are linked and compatible. Institutional structures, cultural values, governance, and administrative and operational processes were examined to better understand how noncredit instruction works in concert with other college instructional systems and services. Special attention was paid to examining the interrelationships between credit and noncredit curriculum planning, development and approval processes and the levels of understanding and awareness of noncredit instruction in serving diverse adult learning needs. The study examined parity in governance and funding as well.

An 18-person steering committee advised the consulting firm regarding the strategies to use for collecting information. Committee members were drawn from representative groups throughout the state including the Academic Senate, Chief Executive Officers, Chief Instructional Officers, Chief Student Services Officers, Association of Community and Continuing Education (ACCE), Classified Senate, California Community College Association for Occupational Education (CCCAOE), and the System Office. Representatives from the Student Senate and Trustees were actively sought.

A major strategy used to obtain input and information was the focus group. Twelve focus groups involving over 120 people and 22 informational interviews provided substantive input regarding noncredit instruction in the community college. In addition, the steering committee and the Academic Senate conducted a field survey. MIS information was gathered on student demographics and student enrollments, and a review of the literature was conducted. Information gathered was used to frame and inform the findings and recommendations of the report.

Additional input was solicited from the following statewide groups to enhance the feedback from the field including: The Basic Skills Advisory Committee, Family and Consumer Science Advisory Committee, Health Occupations and Discipline Specific Industry Collaborative Advisory Committee, Disabled Students Program and Services Regional Coordinators, California Community Colleges Regional Consortium, Chief Instructional Officers of the California Community Colleges, Academic Senate for the California Community Colleges, and the Association for Community and Continuing Education.

In addition to the study, the Noncredit Alignment Steering Committee was involved in the development of noncredit curriculum approval guidelines. This work included the development of Noncredit at a Glance guide along with nine Compendium Guides for the noncredit categories. These guides will be forwarded to the System Advisory Committee on Curriculum (SACC) for incorporation into the revised Program and Course Approval Handbook and will be used to provide technical assistance to the colleges. An extensive annotated review of the literature was conducted as well.

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Analysis

The report identifies key challenges in organizational alignment of noncredit instruction and proposes a basic framework for improving the integration, articulation and parity of noncredit instruction within the community college system. The report reaffirms the importance of noncredit instruction as an essential element of the mission of the community college system. There is a clear indication that by strengthening access to noncredit instruction, the door is open to higher levels of educational attainment, improved employment opportunities, and a higher quality of life. In addition, the research suggests that when noncredit instruction is recognized as an essential and important part of a continuum of curriculum for all students, higher levels of responsiveness, enrollment, and performance are attained.

The report proposes that by increasing awareness and strengthening the funding, capacity and accountability of noncredit instruction, the community colleges could significantly increase access, success, and readiness of underserved groups, in particular immigrants, the working poor and the underprepared. The report proposes three primary recommendations for strengthening noncredit instruction.

1. Improve state and local curriculum development, articulation, program review and approval process.
2. Build system awareness and capacity for noncredit instruction.
3. Improve the alignment and collaboration between noncredit short-term and credit vocational programs and between noncredit ESL/basic skills and credit courses in ESL. basic skills.

Each of these recommendations is followed by a series of action steps. These recommendations and action steps suggest that noncredit instruction is central to the goal of providing upward social and economic mobility through a commitment to open access and student success. In addition, recommendations and action steps will inform the work undertaken for the Strategic Plan, specifically as it relates to lifelong learning and Goal A, College Awareness and Access, Goal B, Student Success and Readiness, and Goal C, Partnerships for Economic and Workforce Development.

The report also presents several recommendations that may require changes to title 5 regulations. Examples include, but are not limited to, changes in noncredit attendance accounting, development of noncredit program approval criteria, and allowing noncredit apportionment for in-service occupational training, staff development and re-licensing. These recommendations will be forwarded to Legal Affairs as part of a comprehensive title 5 regulation review on curriculum and instruction planned for fall 2006 and spring 2007 in collaboration with SACC. Proposals for regulatory changes will be presented to Consultation Council for further discussion before presentation to the Board for adoption. In addition, steps will be taken to work with MIS to identify performance measures and to incorporate noncredit instruction in the AB 1417 performance framework for California Community Colleges.
Conclusion

The Report of Noncredit Alignment Project: A Learner-Centered Curriculum for All Students should be viewed as an initial step toward comprehensive reform of noncredit instruction. The proposed findings and recommendations provide a basic framework for improving the alignment, integration, and parity of noncredit instruction and should stimulate future discussion of noncredit instruction and its alignment with credit programs.

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