

Springboard to Transfer:
Findings and Analysis
From the First Year of a Learning Community

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Springboard to Transfer

A Three-Semester Learning Community
Designed to Prepare Students for Transfer

Key Features:

- Same English instructor stays with students for 3 semesters
- Shared courses help students build bonds with each other
- At least one book is shared between the two classes, to help students build connections between subjects
- Faculty share one office hour per week in the WRAC Center to discuss student issues, coordinate due dates, and build integrative assignments
- All levels of English integrate reading, writing, and critical thinking.

* This diagram reflects a program revision to take effect in Fall 2006. Semester 1 of the program originally included a ½ unit counseling class called the College Success Series;

however, based on student feedback during Fall 2005, that course has been replaced with the Transfer Planning class above.

**First Three-Semester Cycle
Fall 2005 – Fall 2006**

Semester 1

**English 102 + Social and Cultural Anthropology +
College Success Workshops (1/2 unit counseling)**

Shared Book:
The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down

Semester 2

English 1A + Religion in Contemporary Culture

Shared Books:
The Da Vinci Code
Asking the Right Questions: A Guide to Critical Thinking

Semester 3

English 4 + U.S. History Since 1865

Shared Theme & Text:
U.S. History and Literature Since 1865
The Heath Anthology of American Literature

**Springboard to Transfer
Linked Courses**

Chabot College Fall 2005

The First Year of a New Learning Community Key Conclusions from Springboard to Transfer

1. **One of the strongest quantitative effects of the learning community seems to be in student persistence through the English curriculum.**

Fall 2005 to Spring 2006

Persistence from developmental to college-level English (Eng 102/101B to Eng 1A):

Springboard students: 92%

Students in Chabot's other (non-Springboard) sections: 75%

2. **Students who passed Springboard's English 102 and continued into the program's college-level English classes (called "Continuing Springboarders") were more likely to pass English 1A with a C or higher than students who joined the learning community in the second semester (called "New Springboarders.")**

Success Rate in English 1A, Spring 2006

Continuing Springboarders: 65% or 67%*

*Figure not final until one student resolves grade of "Incomplete."

New Springboarders: 58%

Why?

Continuing Springboarders did not necessarily have stronger skills. In fact, they were proportionally more likely to receive C's and less likely to receive A's in the course than new students. Continuing Springboarders represented 57% of the total enrollment (43 of 76 students) but only 38% of the A's (3 out of 8), 60% of the B's (15 out of 25), and 71% of the C's (10 out of 14).

The difference was that New Springboarders were much more likely to withdraw. 79% of the W grades (11 out of 14) went to New Springboarders, most of them dropping early in term. Continuing students tended to stick with the class even when performing poorly or experiencing personal difficulties. Unfortunately, this meant that struggling students often received g.p.a.-damaging grades of D or F, rather than the g.p.a.-neutral W.

3. **Springboard students report significantly higher levels of engagement in their own learning and progress on key learning goals than Chabot students as a whole.**

See Tables 1 & 2 to follow.

4. **Springboard students reported impressive progress on 3 primary outcomes for Eng 1A.**

	<u>% reporting "some" or "a lot" of progress</u>
Reading effectively	92%
Writing effectively	96%
Critical thinking	96%

5. **Despite their high levels of engagement and learning, significant percentages of Springboard students were unsuccessful in both developmental English and first-semester college composition.**

<u>Unsuccessful in English 102:</u>	<u>45%</u>
<u>Unsuccessful in English 1A:</u>	<u>37-38%</u>

Why?

For the largest group of these students, the problem is not one of ability, but sustainability. They demonstrate a passing level of proficiency on tests/papers, but are unable to sustain the focus, motivation, and effort to successfully complete the course.

In the fall, for example, 39 students received grades of W or NC in developmental English. Of this group, 51% (20 students) had received grades of C or higher on at least one test or paper. This group was significantly larger than the group whose performance was consistently substandard (18%, 7 students) and those who never turned in a test/paper (31%, 12 students).

See Table 3 to follow, and draft case studies of "unsuccessful" students in English 1A (appendix A).

Table 1: Student Engagement

In a survey administered by the Office of Institutional Research, Springboard to Transfer students reported significantly more engagement in their classes than students in the random sample of college courses.

	Chabot Sample Fall 05 Springboard Students Fall 05 Springboard Students Spring 06		
Survey Item	“Often” or “Very Often”	“Often” or “Very Often”	“Often” or “Very Often”
In your Springboard to Transfer classes, how often have you done the following activities?*			
• Asked questions	43%	60%	67%
• Participated in large class discussions	51%	81%	80%
• Participated in small class discussions or projects	63%	77%	94%
Outside my classes I have:			
• Discussed class topics or assignments with other students in my classes	36%	55%	53%
• Met as a study group with other students in my classes	20%	33%	27%
• Talked about class topics with family, friends, and others	46%	53%	63%
• Met with my instructor to discuss assignments or my progress	24%	31%	45%

* In the college-wide survey, this question read: “Averaging all your classes overall your semesters at Chabot, how often have you done the following activities?”

Table 2: Student Learning

In a survey administered by the Office of Institutional Research, Springboard to Transfer students reported significantly more learning in several key areas than students in the random sample of college courses.

	Chabot Sample Fall 05	Springboard Fall 05	Springboard Spring 06
Survey Item	“Some” or “A Lot”	“Some” or “A Lot”	“Some” or “A Lot”
As a result of the Springboard to Transfer program, how much progress have you made in the following areas?*			
• Reading effectively	68%	80%	92%
• Writing effectively	73%	86%	96%
• Using computers and other technology effectively	61%	82%	76%
• Critical thinking (evaluating, analyzing, questioning)	72%	88%	96%
• Problem-solving (applying knowledge to new situations)	72%	86%	94%
• Thinking for myself	75%	86%	84%
• Understanding diverse philosophies, cultures, and ways of life	64%	83%	86%
• Becoming informed about current issues affecting the U.S. and the world	64%	75%	72%
• Developing a personal code of values and ethics	59%	76%	78%
• Discovering my own potential	69%	84%	88%
• Developing my own creative abilities	66%	88%	84%

* In the college-wide survey, this question read: “As a result of being at Chabot, how much progress have you made in the following areas?”

Table 3: The Problem for Unsuccessful Students – Sustainability, not Ability

In Fall 2005, a large percentage of the students who received grades of “W” or “NC” in Springboard’s developmental English had demonstrated a reasonable grasp of at least some of the core learning goals of the class (reading, reasoning, writing), but then did not ultimately pass. A similar pattern played out the next semester in English 1A.

English 102, Fall 2005

Std nt #	Fina l Gra de	Test 1	Test 2	Test 3	Paper 1	Paper 2	Paper 3	Last Date Attend .
1	W	B-			C			12-Oct
2	NC	B-	C		C-	D+		7-Nov
3	W				C+/B-			10-Oct
4	NC	B			C+/C(penalty)			30-Nov
5	W	B+			B			18-Oct
6	NC	C	C-		C			19- Dec
7	NC	B+	C	C+	C/D+ (penalties)	D+/B- (Rewrite)	D	19- Dec
8	NC	D	D		C+	C+		19- Dec
9	NC	B-	A	B+	C/D+(penalties)			15-Dec
10	W	F	D		C	B-		10- Nov
11	NC	B+	A		B			1-Dec
12	NC	C	B	D	B-	D+/D (penalty)	F	20- Dec
13	NC	B-	A	C	C/F(penalties)			10-Nov
14	W	C+			C-			25-Oct
15	W		B	A		F		22- Nov
16	NC	C-	A-	B+	C	C-		22- Nov
17	NC		A	C-	C-/D+ (penalty)	C-	D	15- Dec
18	NC	C	B	C	D+	D	F	15- Dec
19	NC	D+	F	C-	C+/C(penalty)			8-Dec
20	NC		C-/D+	A-	B-/C+			13- Nov

*Students are penalized for not turning in rough drafts and/or turning in their final papers after the deadline. They are allowed to rewrite one paper and submit it for re-evaluation.

Discussion & Implications

Though this study has focused primarily on the learning community as an intervention to help students be more successful in their community college English courses, it seems important to briefly comment on the core English curriculum embedded within that learning community. At all levels of the composition sequence, Chabot's curriculum integrates reading, writing, and critical thinking; uses full-length books (not just short essays); and features a student-centered classroom environment with in-class discussions, small group work, and hands-on activities like in-class writing, peer review, and debates. At the developmental level (English 101A/B, 102) and the first-semester of college composition (English 1A), courses use primarily non-fiction texts; while critical analysis of literature is the focus of the second-semester college composition course (English 4). There is little (if any) personal narrative writing in the Chabot curriculum; instead, assignments require students to discuss ideas and information from assigned readings.

English courses within the Springboard to Transfer learning community follow this model, and data from Springboard's first year suggests that the curriculum is, on the whole, an effective way to facilitate student learning. On surveys, Springboard students report significant progress in the core outcomes of reading, writing, and critical thinking. This is confirmed in the reflection essays they write about their own learning each term (discussed in the draft case studies of Appendix A) and in their performance on tests, papers, and in-class activities.

Beyond the basic curriculum, what is the impact of being in a learning community like Springboard to Transfer? As detailed earlier in this report, the biggest quantitative impact seems to be in increasing both retention (especially by the second semester) and persistence from developmental to college-level English.

The reason for this is likely the way Springboard changes students' experience of the community college. Non-residential community colleges often suffer from a lack of campus community. Students drive in, take an assortment of classes with an assortment of different people, then drive away to their multiple work and family obligations. Unless a student is particularly extroverted or one of the small percentage involved in extracurricular campus activities, the environment does not encourage deep connections between students. The same is often true of relationships between students and their teachers.

In a learning community like Springboard, on the other hand, students have 2-3 classes per term with the same core group of peers. They also stay with the same English instructor for multiple semesters, which allows for a much deeper student-teacher relationship. The connections students form through Springboard provide a kind of social glue that keeps them in school, even when they are struggling. I would argue that this glue is the most

important factor in the high persistence rate from English 102 to English 1A and the high retention rate of “continuing Springboarders” in English 1A (that is students in their second semester of the program, who were much less likely to withdraw mid-semester than students who joined the program that term).

Does Springboard help more students succeed – that is, pass – their English courses, especially at the developmental level where so many get stuck? That remains an open question. So far, success rates in the program have been comparable to the average success rates for non-Springboard sections of the same courses. However, it is unclear whether this is a good sample for comparison. In Fall 2005, for example, it is likely that Springboard was disproportionately young (counselors had strongly recommended it to new students, and the program included a large majority who came straight out of high school). We have not yet analyzed how Springboard’s racial and economic demographics that semester compared to the general population of developmental English students.

Though these questions need further exploration, the high rates of non-success in Springboard’s developmental and college-level English classes remain a concern. Data show that Springboard students are deeply engaged, they are learning, and they are highly satisfied with the program. And yet, each semester, many of them do not pass. As discussed earlier, the English curriculum does seem to be facilitating student learning of the core outcomes of reading, writing, and critical thinking, and in Fall 2005, more than half of the unsuccessful students received grades of C or higher on their tests/papers. So why didn’t they pass?

This brings us to perhaps the most important conclusion about why community college students aren’t succeeding in the English curriculum: the problem is not ability, but sustainability. The majority of unsuccessful students in both English 102 and English 1A had demonstrated that they were capable of performing at a passing level, but then did not sustain the focus, effort, and motivation to hang on and pass the course. They didn’t complete required coursework; they lost stamina and motivation; they dropped the academic ball when juggling work, school, and family demands; they didn’t effectively monitor their own progress and take corrective steps when they get off track; they didn’t put enough time into their assignments.

My awareness of this issue caused me to approach my teaching differently in spring semester. After seeing so many capable students fall away in English 102, I became a more intrusive teacher in my Spring English 1A classes. As soon as I saw students getting off track, I tried to communicate with them one-on-one. Students who missed a reading test, for example, would receive an “I am worried about you” email telling them that missing a test is a warning sign about their performance in the class overall, asking them to talk with me about what was going on, and alerting them to times for make-up tests. Students who missed several classes would get a similar email.

When collecting papers, I began requiring students who had not completed their assignment to write me a note explaining why and committing to a date when they would turn it in. This technique – which I borrowed from one of the other English faculty participating in the faculty inquiry group in fall 2005 – serves two purposes: it alerts me to which students are falling behind, and it encourages them to be accountable for their work. In the fall, without a mechanism like this, some struggling students slipped beneath my radar. Buried under stacks of student papers, I sometimes wouldn't realize that a particular student hadn't done the assignment until more than two weeks had passed, and by then that student would be even further behind. The snowball effect can be brutal in an English course, and I needed a way to intervene earlier.

I also began issuing more “mandatory rewrite” grades on unsatisfactory papers and scheduling one-on-one conferences with struggling students (at my initiative) to discuss what went wrong on their essay. In the past, I was more likely to simply assign a low grade, with a note encouraging students to come into my office hours for help, but I left it up to them whether or not they actually did so. The result of this approach —not surprisingly—was that the students who were already motivated and self-directed tended to use my office hours and the struggling ones would hide out and not receive the one-on-one help they sorely needed.

At the end of the term, when so many students fall apart, I made a careful list of people who didn't turn in the last essay, then sent them an email alerting them to the serious consequences of not turning in a major assignment and urging them to turn in *something*, even if it wasn't their best work. (Several did not realize that even if they had received good grades on the rest of their work, getting a “zero” on the last paper would automatically pull their average down to a D or F. They hadn't done the math.). In some cases, I sent multiple emails. With one of my strongest students – high B average, incredible grasp of course readings, great critical thinker and star of the class debates – I enlisted her friends to encourage her to turn in her last paper. (In her midterm self-reflection essay, this student had said that she didn't want to make excuses for herself but that she was struggling with a number of personal issues, including a family member having been kidnapped).

Though I was glad to see that my interventions helped several students (including the one above) to pass English 1A, I have to admit a certain level of resistance to taking on this kind of intrusive intervention. Part of me thinks *This is college. They need to be responsible for themselves*. But the other part of me knows that part of my job as a teacher – particularly a teacher of developmental English – is to help students *learn* to become responsible, successful students. I need to help them cultivate academic sustainability.

In the fall, I plan to explore ways to help students calculate and monitor their overall grade as the term progresses (such as through the Gradequick software Chabot provides and/or individualized Excel spreadsheets). I also plan to explore ways to use peer mentors/teaching assistants to help me manage the demands of intrusive intervention when I start a new

developmental-level cycle in the Spring. Though the details remain sketchy, I already have one strong student who wants to be a Springboard alumnae mentor to the next cycle of Springboarders who begin English 102 next Spring.