

**The First Complete Cycle of the
Springboard to Transfer
Learning Community:
Key Findings and Analysis**

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**By
Katie Hern, Ed.D.
English Instructor & Coordinator
Springboard to Transfer
Chabot College
khern@chabotcollege.edu
(510) 723-7424**

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Springboard to Transfer

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

Key Features:

- Same English instructor teaches all 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 college reading and writing center to discuss student issues, coordinate due dates, and build integrative assignments
- All levels of English integrate reading, writing, and critical thinking.
- Program capacity is 88 students, split between 3 sections of English, 2 sections of the paired g.e. course, and 6 small sections of the first-term counseling course
- A core group of students enrolls for all three terms, and many new students join the program in semesters two and three, as spaces become available.

* In the first Springboard cycle, counselors offered a ½ unit “College Success” workshop series. Based on student feedback, we have replaced that course with the ½ unit “Transfer Planning” course above.

Overview

Springboard to Transfer was designed to help more students make it through the English curriculum. In a May 2004 report proposing this new learning community, we noted a number of alarming trends in the “flow-through” data on Chabot students:

a low rate of transfer-readiness (only 7% of those who enrolled in Fall 1999 became transfer-ready within four years); high attrition rates from one semester to the next (40% of students in fall 2001 did not re-enroll in Spring 2002); difficulties making it from developmental to college-level English (“of all the students who enrolled in 101A in Fall 2001, only 24% of them succeeded in English 1A within two years”); and a disturbing fall-off among *successful* students from one level of English to the next (“Although 54% of students enrolled in 101A in Fall 2001 succeeded in that class, only 32% actually went on to enroll in English 101B within two years.”)

A year and a half after the first Springboard cohort enrolled in developmental English, we have the chance to step back and reflect on how it’s going. Did the first Springboard cycle help more students make it through the English curriculum and build momentum toward transfer?

The answer is, unequivocally, yes.

The following report will detail a wide range of findings from the first complete cycle of Springboard to Transfer – starting from English 102 in Fall 2005 and ending with English 4 in Fall 2006 – data which shows that the program had a positive impact on student engagement, learning, retention, success, persistence in the English curriculum, and progress toward transfer.

A Closer Look at the Founding Cohort

In prior SPECC reports, much of the Springboard to Transfer data has looked at the program overall – for example, how did the success rates for Springboard’s English 1A compare with the average for other sections of the course? While this is a helpful indicator, such data does not distinguish among the different kinds of Springboard students -- in particular, it does not differentiate “founding cohort” students who remained in the program for multiple semesters from the “new” students who rotated into Springboard along the way. It therefore obscures the impact of an extended “dose” of the intervention.

For this report, we wanted to focus on the founding Springboard cohort – students who joined in the first semester – and how they did over the program’s three semesters. A story begins to emerge as we look at this group, a story about effects that start slowly and magnify over time, involving characters with the odds stacked against them.

In the first semester of Springboard, it is difficult to tell whether the program makes a meaningful difference in student performance. On surveys, students report high levels of engagement, learning, and satisfaction with the program; but retention and success rates for Springboard’s English 102 are no better than the average for other sections (75% retention, 55% success).

The impact starts to become more visible, however, in the second semester. Students who successfully passed Springboard’s English 102 were much more likely to persist into English 1A the

following semester (92%) than students in other sections of the course (75%). And if they took the course within Springboard, not only were their retention rates much higher than average (93% vs. 72%), but their success in English 1A started to outpace the average for other sections of the course (65% vs. 61%).

In the third semester, persistence from English 1A to English 4/7 was even higher for Springboard students than for students in other sections of the course (79% vs. 51%). The members of the original cohort – now in their third semester of Springboard – again had much higher than average retention rates (91% vs. 76%), and this time, their success rates significantly outpaced the average for other sections of the course (87% vs. 69%).

At the end of Fall 2006, 100% of the students who remained in Springboard for all three semesters were “transfer directed” (earned at least 12 units and attempted college-level Math or English), and the vast majority were making steady progress toward transfer (95% had earned 15 or more transferable units).

Of course, Springboard is not a panacea for the difficulties community college students face making it through the English curriculum. Of the 87 students that began in Fall 05, only 23 had succeeded in English 4/7 by the end of Fall 06 – 26% of the original cohort. Nevertheless, this was a significant improvement over the Fall 05 comparison cohort. Of the 360 students enrolling in a non-learning community section of English 102, 58 succeeded in English 4/7 during the same timeframe – or 16%.

But wait, you might say, correlation is not causation. Maybe these students were more likely to be successful in the first place. Did a program named “Springboard to Transfer” attract an inherently more motivated and skilled group, students who would have succeeded and persisted with or without the program?

So, here’s the “odds-stacked-against” part: the first cohort of Springboard to Transfer included higher proportions of African-American and Latino students, and lower proportions of Asian and White students, than the comparison cohort that took English 102 in Fall 2005. In other words, Springboard had more students from groups that are usually less successful in the English curriculum, and fewer students from groups that are usually more successful. The first cohort also included a sizable percentage of students with low academic motivation, as reflected in several indicators to be discussed later. And while the comparison cohort got more heavily White/Asian as it moved to higher levels of the English curriculum, Springboard’s founding cohort remained consistently high in its proportion of Black and Latino students, and consistently low in its proportion of Asian and White students.

Overall, the founding cohort did much better than education research on the achievement gap for Blacks and Latinos would lead us to expect – even during that first semester of developmental English when Springboard’s success rates were the same as the Chabot average.

Engagement

Table 1: Student Engagement

In surveys 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. The results reflect all Springboard students – members of the founding cohort and those who joined the program along the way.

	Chabot Sample Fall 05	SB Fall 05 SB Spring 06 SB Fall 06		
Survey Item	“Often” or “Very Often”	“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%	56%
• Participated in large class discussions	51%	81%	80%	82%
• Participated in small class discussions or projects	63%	77%	94%	82%
Outside my classes I have:				
• Discussed class topics or assignments with other students in my classes	36%	55%	53%	47%
• Met as a study group with other students in my classes	20%	33%	27%	18%
• Talked about class topics with family, friends, and others	46%	53%	63%	59%
• Met with my instructor to discuss assignments or my progress	24%	31%	45%	50%

* 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?”

Learning

Table 2: Student Learning

In surveys 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. The results reflect all Springboard students – members of the founding cohort and those who joined the program along the way.

	Chabot Sample Fall 05	SB	Fall 05	SB	Spring 06 SB Fall 06
Survey Item	“Some” or “A Lot”	“Some” or “A Lot”	“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%	91%	
• Writing effectively	73%	86%	96%	97%	
• Communicating with respect for the views of others		75% 77% 88%	91%		
• Using computers and other technology effectively	61%	82%	76%	64%	
• Critical thinking (evaluating, analyzing, questioning)	72%	88%	96%	91%	
• Problem-solving (applying knowledge to new situations)	72%	86%	94%	85%	
• Thinking for myself	75%	86%	84%	88%	
• Understanding diverse philosophies, cultures, and ways of life	64%	83%	86%	91%	
• Becoming informed about current issues affecting the U.S. and the world	64%	75%	72%	82%	
• Developing a personal code of values and ethics	59%	76%	78%	69%	
• Discovering my own potential	69%	84%	88%	88%	

• Developing my own creative abilities	66%	88%	84%	88%
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* 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?”

Retention

Table 3: Overall Retention Rates

In the second and third semester of the program, the overall retention rates for Springboard English were higher than the same as the average for other sections of the course. The “overall” figure includes members of the founding group, as well as members who joined as new Springboard students in the second or third semesters.

	Springboard Overall	Chabot	Average
English 102, Fall 05		75%	74%
English 1A, Spring 06		80%	72%
English 4, Fall 06		81%	76%

Table 4: Retention Among Founding Springboard Cohort

When members of the original cohort enrolled in more than one semester of Springboard, their retention rates significantly exceeded the Chabot average.

	Springboard Founding Cohort	Chabot Average
English 102, Fall 05	75%	74%
English 1A, Spring 06	93%	72%
English 4, Fall 06	91%	76%

Success

Table 5: Overall Success Rates

For each of the three semesters, the overall success rates for Springboard English were roughly the same as the average for non-learning community sections of the course. The “overall” Springboard figure includes members of the founding group, as well as members who joined Springboard in the second or third semesters.

	Springboard Overall	Average for non-learning community sections
English 102, Fall 05	55% 57%	
English 1A, Spring 06	62%	61%
English 4, Fall 06	70%	69%

Table 6: Success Among Springboard Founding Cohort

When members of the original cohort enrolled in more than one semester of Springboard, their success rates exceeded the average for non-learning community sections – slightly in English 1A and by a large margin in English 4.

	Springboard Founding Cohort	Average for non-learning community sections
English 102, Fall 05	55% 57%	
English 1A, Spring 06	65%	61%
English 4, Fall 06	87%	69%

Progress through English Curriculum

Table 7: Persistence in English

Springboard students persisted through the English curriculum at much higher rates than students in non-learning community sections.

	Springboard Overall	Average for non-learning community sections
Fall 05 → Spring 06 English 102/101B → English 1A	92%	74%
Spring 06 → Fall 06 English 1A → English 4/7	79%	51%

Though a few successful Springboard students chose to take a non-Springboard section each term, the vast majority chose to continue inside the learning community. Of the 23 students from the founding group who passed English 4/7 by the end of Fall 06, 20 of them remained in Springboard for all three semesters.

Table 8: Completion of English Sequence

Springboard's founding cohort was significantly more likely to complete the English composition sequence within a year and a half than other students who started English 102 at the same time.

	Springboard Founding Cohort	Comparison Cohort
Enrolled in English 102, Fall 05	87	360
Succeeded in English 4/7 by end of Fall 06	23	58
	26%	16%

Progress toward Transfer

Table 9: Progress Toward Transfer at End of Fall 2006

	Enrolled in SB Fall 05 Only (N=44)	Enrolled in SB Fall 05, Spr 06 & Fall 06 (N=20)	Comparison Cohort (N=240)
<i>Transfer-Directedness</i> (earned at least 12 units and attempted college-level Math or English)	100%	55%	
16%			
<i>Transferable Units Successfully Completed</i>			
Under 12 units	61%	0%	25%
12-14.5 units	8%	5%	9%
15-29.5 units	21%	75%	26%
30-44.5 units	10%	20%	19%
45+ units	0%	0%	11%

The above comparisons are a little misleading. The three-term Springboard group will automatically be stronger than the comparison cohort, because the former includes only students who had passed English 1A and enrolled in English 4, while the comparison group includes ALL students who enrolled in a non-learning community section of English 102.

However, looking at the data in the first column reveals something significant about the founding Springboard cohort. Of the initial group of 87 students, half of them (44) enrolled in only one semester of Springboard. And the majority of this group did not go much further at Chabot in the following year -- only 16% were transfer directed by the end of Fall 06.

One other element in the above data seems worth noting. No one from the three-term Springboard had completed more than 45 transferable units by the end of Fall 2006, while 11% of the comparison group had. This is no doubt connected to the fact that the majority of Springboard students were first-time college students in Fall 05, while the comparison cohort included a higher proportion of continuing students who had spent more time at Chabot accruing those units.

How “Typical” Was the Founding Springboard Cohort?

Ethnic Composition

Springboard’s first cohort had higher proportions of African-Americans and Latinos, and lower proportions of Whites and Asians than in the population that took a non-learning community English 102 that term.

Table 10: English 102, Fall 2005

	Springboard Founding Cohort (N=87)	Comparison Cohort (N=360)
African American	17 47	
Latino	32 75	
<i>Combined Percentage</i>	56%	35%
White	8 48	
Asian	7 73	
<i>Combined Percentage</i>	17%	34%

These differences are important when considering success rates. African-Americans and Latinos tend to have lower success rates in Chabot’s English curriculum, and Asian-Americans and Whites tend to have higher success rates. Given this, it seems likely that the founding cohort would have had lower success rates if they had not enrolled in Springboard. [I know there must be a way to estimate the success rates we could have expected for a group with these demographics. Carnegie folks, do you have ideas on this? And would it be worth the effort to do this?]

Another significant finding about the ethnic composition of the founding cohort is that the proportions of African-American/Latino and Asian/White students remained consistent as the founding cohort progressed to English 4/7; while the comparison cohort became even less African-American/Latino and more Asian/White.

Table 11: Enrolled in English 4/7 by Fall 2006

	Founding Springboard Cohort (N=25)	Comparison Cohort (N=60)
African American	5	5
Latino	10	12
<i>Combined Percentage</i>	60%	25%
White	2	5
Asian	2	21
<i>Combined Percentage</i>	16%	43%

Academic Motivation

Another initial difference worth exploring is whether a program called “Springboard to Transfer” might inherently attract a more academically motivated population. Qualitative data from student reflection essays suggests that, for some students, this was the case. They joined the program because they felt it would help them achieve educational goals that were important to them.

However, the program also attracted a significant group of students whose academic motivation seemed quite low. We estimate that between 1/3 and 1/2 of the first cohort ended up in Springboard because they needed English 102 and all the other sections of were full. Given their late registration – immediately before the term, or during the first week of classes – these students may have been less focused and self-directed about college than the students who registered early enough to secure spots in other sections.

While this issue is difficult to assess, other data suggests that a sizable portion of the original cohort was not highly motivated to pursue their education at Chabot. 18% of the first group never turned in a paper or took a test in Springboard’s English 102, and the progress toward transfer data for the group who enrolled in only the program’s first semester shows that most of them accrued very few units in the following year.

Skill Level

Since developmental English courses are Credit/No Credit at Chabot, it is difficult to compare the skill levels of the first Springboard cohort to another group of students. However, their performance during the second semester suggests that they may have had lower skills than other students. In Springboard’s English 1A, the founding group had higher success rates than students who were new to the program that term, because they were much less likely to withdraw than the new students. However, they were proportionally more likely to receive Cs and less likely to receive As than the new students.

Other Variables

Springboard students were much younger than the general population of Chabot English 102 students – 92% were under 22, compared with 67% in other sections. (We suspect this was because the package of English and g.e. courses was well-suited to students entering Chabot straight out of high school, and that many of them heard about the program from Chabot counselors during orientations and other forums for prospective/new students.) The first Springboard cohort was slightly more female (60% vs 56% in comparison group), more part-time (31% vs 22%), and filled with many more first-time college students (73% vs. 57%).

The Messy Part: Explaining the Results

So, how do we explain Springboard's positive results in engagement, learning, retention, success, persistence, and progress toward transfer? What is going on here?

First, we have to acknowledge that different grading criteria among faculty might interfere with meaningful comparisons between Springboard and other sections of the course. Additionally, the number of contextual variables at play is staggering – to name just a few, there's the personalities of the individual faculty involved, the pedagogical approaches they used, the varying levels of skill and motivation students arrived with, the personalities of the specific students who enrolled, and even the "classroom persona" and group dynamics that emerged in each section of English depending upon which students were in the room.

Even with these qualifications, however, we have some ideas about the why we saw such positive results in the founding Springboard cohort.

Springboard's structure promotes retention and persistence. College retention research has demonstrated that students who feel connected to the college – whether that connection is academic, personal, social, or co-curricular – tend to stay in school more than those who don't. The way Springboard is organized creates opportunities for much stronger connections among students – who are together for 2 to 3 classes each term for up to three semesters – and stronger connections between students and the English instructor, who teaches all three semesters of the program. These connections provided a kind of social glue that kept students enrolled and persisting, even when other parts of their life were pulling them away from their studies. In self-reflection essays, Springboard students – especially those who stayed for 2-3 semesters – often spoke of strong bonds with their peers and instructors, said they felt more comfortable talking in their Springboard classes than other classes, and said that during moments when they considered dropping out, their relationships with peers and/or Springboard instructors kept them enrolled.

Springboard's structure may also promote deeper student learning. Students continuing in more than one semester had already been successful with this English instructor. They knew the kinds of assignments and tests she gave, they knew how to post on the online discussion board, and they knew her criteria for grading papers (a consistent assessment rubric was used all three semesters). They didn't need to navigate a new instructor's writing peeves (is it ok to use "I" in their essay?), or master the idiosyncrasies of a new instructor's language (one teacher might speak of "critical voice," another call it "analysis," but they're both really talking about the same thing). They knew the game already, and so were able to jump right into learning the following semester without lag time for acclimating themselves. Deeper learning was also facilitated by the interconnected course content between the paired classes. This was especially true in the last – and most tightly interconnected – semester. In their self-reflection essays that term, many students reported that the connections between their history and literature classes had helped them to learn both subjects better.

Because the same English instructor teaches all three semesters of the program, that instructor's style also exerts a significant influence on the outcomes. It's difficult to comment on this objectively, since that instructor is also the person writing this report, but it seems useful to describe key pedagogical elements in Springboard's English classes:

- Classroom activities designed to get students actively engaging with course readings -- such as in-class writing, small group and whole-class discussions of questions about key ideas/issues in text, in-class debates, on-line Discussion Boards, student-generated questions/topics for writing assignments, little to no lecture.
- Efforts to cultivate students' metacognitive awareness of their own learning -- self-reflection essays; explicit rubrics to assess their own and their peers' papers; written self-evaluations included with each paper.
- Extensive one-on-one attention from instructor -- passing around sign-up sheets for individual conferences on most papers, sending emails to students who missed tests/paper deadlines/classes, checking in with students quietly during or after class if they'd been absent or were falling behind, working with students individually during in-class writing time in computer lab. This one-on-one emphasis increased in the second and third semesters of Springboard (as a deliberate response to the ability/sustainability gap described below). In English 102, 31% of Springboard students responded "Often" or "Very Often" on the item "Met with my instructor to discuss assignments or my progress"; the next semester, that figure rose to 45%, and in the last semester, 50%.
- Efforts to close the ability/sustainability gap -- seeing that half of the students who did not pass Springboard's English 102 had received passing grades on tests/papers, the English instructor made several changes to her teaching practice. These included more flexible policies on late papers and attendance to help capable students recover when they'd gone off track; "intrusive interventions" when students began falling away (e.g. emails about missed deadlines/tests/classes); front-loading the heavy coursework to the first 15 weeks and lightening demands at end when students were overwhelmed by their other courses; a more transparent grading system and a handout to help students track their own grade; and efforts to increase students' awareness of the ability/sustainability gap (e.g.: in-class discussions of the data from Fall 2005, with students asked to speculate on the reasons behind the gap and offer ideas about how faculty might help address it). Many of these changes were first implemented in the English 4 semester and may help to explain why success rates among the founding group were so much higher than the average that term.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, as students experienced success in Springboard, their confidence grew and they gained traction and momentum in their education at Chabot. This increased confidence was an important theme in the self-reflection essays the founding group wrote in their last semester of Springboard. One student expressed it this way:

I know that most students will tell you that from Springboard they learned how to use credible sources, how to structure papers, how to make strong arguments, how to evaluate evidence and come to your own educated conclusion, how to be better critical thinkers and make strong and deep connections and so on, but you get so much more than that. You not only become a strong writer but a strong student and person as well. I could go on and on with what I've learned from Springboard, however my new found confidence in my writing is more than I could have asked for. It feels good to read material that is challenging and understand it enough to write a strong paper with my own critical voice.

Another wrote:

Dr. Hern's Springboard class didn't only help me with "English" it also helped me with my other classes as well. By having her English class linked to other classes it made my transition from high school to college much easier. But for me, more importantly -- and this may not make sense -- it helped me with my math. Back in elementary school math was my best and favorite subject. Every single elementary teacher I had asked me to take GATE math classes and even some gave me advanced math packets to do at home. But again I got caught up in the web of ignorance and by high school, math was least favorite and my worst subject by far. But luckily for me reading Malcolm's book and taking Dr. Hern's Springboard classes helped me find the confidence in math I had lost years ago. I found that confidence by remembering how much I loved math "back in da day" and how easy it was for me. So, I just felt that even though college math is literally in my opinion a LITTLE harder than grade school math, I knew that if I could do it back then, I can do it now, and I was right. Right now I am in a statistics class and even though it is the last math class I have to take at Chabot, I might take a higher level math because it is so easy to me. Back in high school I would have never dreamed that I would sit in a college level math class and be bored because of how easy it is and I would never imagined that people old enough to be my mom or dad would be asking for my help... Right now I feel I have the skills, the abilities, and most importantly the confidence to be and do whatever I want in life. Which I will. I honestly feel that if I put mind to it I can really change the world, and I might have never have felt like that if it was not for Dr. Hern and the Springboard program.