

When Capable Students Fail: The Academic Sustainability Gap

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The Gap Between Ability and Sustainability

One Teacher's Wake Up Call

At the end of Fall 2005, I was devastated to realize that only

55% of students passed my English classes, while the rest withdrew or received No Credit.

Perhaps I shouldn't have been surprised. I was teaching three sections of English 102, a developmental course that helps under-prepared students get ready for college-level English. Pre-college English classes have notoriously low pass rates in community colleges, and at Chabot College, a 55% pass rate was pretty typical. And yet, I had expected more students to pass.

I had good reason to. Among the students who withdrew or received No Credit, 51% had received at least one grade of C or higher. I expected them to pass the class because they had shown me, on tests and essays, that they could do the kinds of reading, reasoning, and writing I was asking them to do.

Their problem was not ability, but sustainability. They could do the work, but they did not sustain the focus, motivation, and effort to pass the course.

I've been trying to understand why ever since.

I have conducted in-depth interviews, reviewed transcripts, and studied students' self-reflection essays. I have shared data on the sustainability gap with my colleagues, and with students in subsequent English classes, and asked them to help me interpret it.

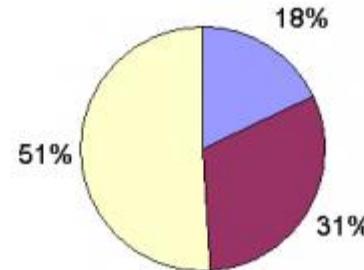
This site will present the interrelated and overlapping themes that have emerged to explain the gap between students' ability and sustainability, and what teachers might do to



Sustainability Gap (Noun):

The gap between students' *ability* to perform and the performance they actually sustain over the semester. Chronic condition in community colleges whereby students earn passing grades on individual assignments then withdraw or fail class. See also: Teacher confusion and demoralization.

Students Receiving W or NC



- All Test/Paper Grades C- or Below
- Never Turned in a Paper or Took Test
- One or More Paper/Test Grades of C or Higher

close that gap.

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