STUDENT ENHANCEMENT & EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH PROJECT

Counseling-Based Interventions Aiding in the Return of Probationary Students to Successful Standing

Proposal submitted for consideration for the California Community Colleges Board of Governors’ Exemplary Program Award

NOVEMBER 2004
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Proposal for Consideration for: Exemplary Program Award

Name of Program: Student Enhancement & Educational Research Project

Conceptualized: Spring-Fall 2001

Implemented: Piloted in Winter 2002 & Institutionalized Starting Summer 2002

Main Intervention: Probationary Student “Re-Orientation” (i.e., Back to Success session)

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• Esau Tovar, SEER Project Director
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Orientations Currently Conducted by:

• Transfer/Counseling Center Counselors

AIMS & HISTORY OF SEER

The Student Enhancement & Educational Research Project (SEER) was first conceptualized in spring 2001 by a team of counseling faculty (Esau Tovar, Retention Counselor & Student Success Project Program Director; Merril Simon, Student Success Project Faculty Leader) and administrators (Brenda Benson, Dean of Counseling; Judith Penchansky, Assistant Dean for Special Programs; and Erica LeBlanc, Director of Grants) concerned with the growing number of first-time college students completing their first and second semester on academic probation (poor grades) and/or progress probation (completing less than 50% of attempted coursework). Ongoing research had indicated that probationary rates for these students as well as college-wide had plateaued at 28%-35% per semester cohort. This lack of success significantly and negatively impacted students’ ability to remain at the college; complete course work; and subsequently earn degrees and/or transfer from Santa Monica College (SMC). While some strategies had been “tried out” to prevent students from “falling through the cracks,” not all were effective in preventing many students from ending up on probation. Thus the need for an “intrusive” program to assist those in academic difficulty.

Upon securing commitment from the college’s senior administration and funding from a research grant source (California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office Funds for Instructional Improvement), the SEER project was developed and housed under the SMC Student Success Project and with the direct supervision of the Dean of Counseling & Retention. The aim of the project was to design and measure the
impact that specific counseling-based strategies (described in next section) had on probationary students’ successful courses completion (i.e., retention), persistence to subsequent semesters, and attainment of higher grades allowing them to overcome their probationary status.

STRATEGIES IMPLEMENTED

Having thoroughly researched the literature on student development, engagement, retention, probation, and assessed best practices at other colleges, the leading counseling faculty opted for the design, implementation, and evaluation of the following activities:

DEVELOPMENT OF INNOVATIVE PROBATIONARY STUDENT RE-ORIENTATION

Although the majority of students entering SMC are required to, and do, attend a college orientation prior to their first semester of enrollment, the regular orientation program in place in past semesters did not fully address the issues that often lead to students being placed on probation. Hence, this innovative probationary student re-orientation was developed. In designing its specific content, the counselors involved accounted for such things as: student history of poor academic performance; commitment to college; academic motivation; major decidedness; understanding of institutional expectations; balancing of school, work, and personal commitments; and the importance of connecting with faculty members and peers.

The re-orientation incorporated active, collaborative, and problem based learning strategies and afforded numerous opportunities for interaction and exchange of dialogue. It was through this exchange that counselors leading these sessions focused students’ attention on conducting a realistic assessment of their performance in college; their strengths and weaknesses as they related to study techniques; their involvement in in-and-out of the classroom; family responsibilities; balancing work commitments, etc. Additionally, using real-life probationary student scenarios during the orientation provided students with the opportunity to brainstorm in small groups potential solutions to academic, personal, and social difficulties experienced by college students.

During the discussions, counselors identified a variety of support services offered at SMC, including tutoring, counseling, financial aid, and career counseling. Students also were supported in acquiring the necessary skills to both develop and revise their Student Educational Plans by taking into consideration the academic and personal problems experienced the previous semester, their majors, academic and career goals, as well as their need for academic support. Additionally, students completed the College Student Inventory (Stratil, 1988) and a mattering questionnaire (Simon & Tovar, 2003) for subsequent use and interpretation in counseling sessions. These instruments were used to assess students’ readiness and motivation to change unproductive behaviors and potential challenges. It is our contention that having used this multifaceted approach in the re-orientation sessions that facilitated the academic and social integration of these students into the college community. The re-orientation is a work in progress and is evaluated/revamped on an ongoing basis and often tailored to the needs of students participating in any single session.

USE OF INTRUSIVE AND DEVELOPMENTAL ADVISING

As part of this project, we implemented a structured intrusive/developmental advisement approach to counseling including case management and monitoring of probationary students. During individual meetings with the students subsequent to the re-orientation, counselors conducted a holistic assessment of personal, academic, career, and financial difficulties described by the student. Interventions deemed necessary by the counselor were based on an assessment of the student’s readiness and/or motivation to work toward change. More specifically, these interventions were based on guidelines offered by Hirsch’s Helping Students Succeed (2001). Ultimately, all intervention strategies were centered on the students’ ability or amenability to engage in “inner work” and action work leading to positive change. Issues pertaining to career indecision (which
greatly contributes to lack of success), family and financial obligations, and transition to college were also discussed in a proactive manner.

PROMOTION OF ENGLISH & MATH SKILLS ASSESSMENT

Research leading to the development of the program suggested that half the first-time college students attending Santa Monica College did not complete an English/ESL or math assessment test before starting their first semester of college. This was of great concern given that assessment of basic skills is paramount to ensuring the proper placement of students in courses most appropriate for their skill levels, and, even more important, counselors must have this information available in order to suggest enrollment into courses other than English. An unfortunate consequence of students’ delaying their math and English assessment tests is that they delay enrollment in English and mathematics courses. This project sought to increase the percentage of participating probationary students completing both assessment tests, and use this information in course advisement.

PROCESSES & PROCEDURES

For the last two years since the probationary student re-orientation was designed and implemented, nearly 4,000 students have participated. Students are first identified through our student information system as being on probation; they are then invited to participate in the re-orientation (referred to as Back to Success session in correspondence); and subsequently have been monitored by a team of counselors. Using the College Student Inventory and various student development models (e.g., Astin, 1993; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Schlossberg, 1995) to address the multiple needs of students has significantly aided in reaching the success rates attained by participating students.

While one may question the uniqueness or innovation of our approach, our review of the literature did not find any similar orientation for probationary students that was two hours in length; small group format (not a class); focused on active and problem based learning strategies, and accounting for developmental and transitional stages characteristic of probationary students. The integration of these characteristics permitted the achievement of very ambitious, yet accomplishable objectives.

EVALUATION OF PROGRAM INTERVENTIONS & OUTCOMES

While the evaluation of our strategies is ongoing and longitudinal, outcomes presented here are for the fall 2002 probationary students. We remain committed to continuing to track students’ progress and success and adjust our delivery systems as students’ needs change. Our methodology employed a study group (new probationary students participating in re-orientation) and two control groups to assess the effectiveness of our interventions. Control group 1 consisted of students invited but not attending the re-orientation, and control group 2 consisted of the fall 1999 probationary student cohort.

Success outcomes assessed included course completion rates, grade point average, academic standing, and persistence. The major intervention strategies used to help students become successful were students’ participation in the re-orientation, meetings with counselors where intrusive/developmental advisement was used, and English/Math assessment placement tests completion. The impact of these strategies on success outcomes are discussed in brief below and expanded at-length in the full report.
INFLUENCE OF RE-ORIENTATION PARTICIPATION ON PROBATIONARY OUTCOMES

Although re-orientation participants and non-participants completed the semester with a similar academic standing (80% on academic probation, 2-5% in progress probation, and 14-18% in both), participants performed far better after intervention. In accounting for only participation status in the re-orientation it was found that academic probation for participants had been reduced by the next semester to 40% (an overall decrease of 50%); whereas, that of non-participants was reduced from 80% to 65%. More importantly, a greater proportion of participants had returned to good academic standing (> 2.0 GPA) at the conclusion of their second semester (19% vs. 10% for non-participants). Assessing the impact of intrusive/developmental advising we found that students on academic probation who met with a counselor two or more times during spring 2003 accounted for only 34% of the academic probation cases, compared to 42% for those who did not meet with a counselor. Additionally, more students returned to good academic standing when meeting with a counselor versus those that did not (24% vs. 18%). Thus, these findings suggest that meeting with a counselor aids students in overcoming academic shortcomings.

INFLUENCE OF RE-ORIENTATION ON COURSE COMPLETION, GRADE POINT AVERAGE, AND PERSISTENCE RATES

Statistically significant differences were found between students who participated in the re-orientation and those not participating. Participants were more likely to complete more of their coursework successfully—attaining a grade of “C” or better—after the re-orientation intervention than the latter group: 57% vs. 47% in spring 2003; and 73% vs. 65% in summer 2003. Course completion rates college-wide vary substantially by discipline (50% to mid-70s). This trend carries over with respect to grade point averages attained. Whereas participating students completed their first semester with a mean GPA of 1.09 in fall 2002, they increased it substantially to 1.53 by the end of spring and summer 2003. That students were able to increase their GPA by half-point is more meaningful when one accounts for the mathematical difficulty in making the grade point gains necessary to overcome academic probation. Finally, participating students also persisted to a significantly higher degree than those not participating. Specifically, the persistence rate for fall 2002 to spring 2003 was 72% versus 23%--a near 50 percentage point difference. The fall-to-fall persistence rate was also significantly higher: 43% versus 14%--a 30 percentage point difference.

In addition to participating in the re-orientation, students who participated in intrusive/developmental advising with a counselor, completed their courses to a significantly higher degree than those not working with a counselor: 63% vs. 53% in spring 2003, and 87% vs. 64% in summer 2003. Grade point averages also differed substantially for these students: those meeting with a counselor attained a mean spring 2003 GPA of 1.65 versus 1.45, and 2.29 vs. 1.61 in summer 2003.

IMPACT OF RE-ORIENTATION AND ENGLISH/MATHEMATICS ASSESSMENT ON PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

In spring 2003 and subsequent to the re-orientation intervention, students who completed the English and math assessment tests—regardless of placement level—attained a higher course completion rate for that semester (62%), compared to those who opted not to take the test (49%). The same was true for Math placement level (62% vs. 48%). These rates were also significantly higher from those of students who did not participate in the re-orientation. Persistence rates by orientation participation and placement level were also significantly higher for those in the study group, compared to those in control group 1. The persistence rate from fall 2002 to spring 2003 was 89% for participants who tested, versus 40% for those that did not participate. The same was true for the math placement exam: 85% for those that tested and participated in the re-orientation, versus 44% for those that did not participate. Grade point averages were also substantially higher for students completing the placement examinations and who either participated in the re-orientation or did not. For example, mean spring 2003 GPAs for participating students who tested in English ranged
from 1.48 to 1.71, compared to the 1.22 to 1.40 for those that did not participate in the orientation. The same was true for math: 1.47 to 1.82 for participants and 1.19 to 1.43 for non-participants.

FEASIBILITY OF STRATEGIES FOR OTHER COLLEGES

Given our outcomes and experiences, we firmly believe that the re-orientation model can easily be adapted by other institutions without significant difficulties. Even with having experienced multi-million dollar deficits at our college and layoffs of nearly 40% of our adjunct counseling faculty (resulting in a 30% loss of student contact hours) in the last 2.5 years, we have been able to accomplish significantly more with probationary students than we had in the past when more financial resources and personnel were available. Our re-orientation has allowed us to reach more students and return a greater number of them to successful standing. A committed team of counseling faculty and supportive administrator are key to carrying out these orientations, as is training in, and understanding of developmental and transitional issues faced by students.

Thanks in great part for the conceptualization of intervention strategies, outcomes, and adaptability of these to other colleges, the SEER program was awarded the 2004 Exemplary Practice Award by the National Council on Student Development, an affiliate of the American Association of Community Colleges. The Council cited our program’s effectiveness, quality, significance to the field, and adaptability of strategies to other colleges, in awarding this honor. Findings have been disseminated primarily through a variety of presentations at peer-reviewed, professional conferences. Among these have been the American Educational Research Association, Association for Higher Education, National Academic Advising Association Pacific Region, California Virtual Campus’ Online Instructional and Student Support Services e-Conference (broadcast online), American Counseling Association, and the California Association for Institutional Research.
The aim of the Student Enhancement and Educational Research Project (SEER)—part of the SMC Student Success Project, under the auspices of the Dean of Counseling & Retention—was primarily to increase the percentage of probationary (i.e., academic probation, progress probation, disqualified) students who:

- Completed courses successfully (i.e., retention);
- Persisted in higher proportions to the subsequent semester; and
- Attained higher grades that would allow them to overcome their probationary status.

The intervention strategies designed and implemented included the following and are fully described in the next section:

- Development of an innovative probationary student re-orientation;
- Use of intrusive and developmental advising;
- Assessment of students’ readiness and motivation to change existing patterns of unsuccessful behaviors; and
- Increase rate of assessment of students’ writing, reading, and mathematical skills.

DEVELOPMENT OF PROBATIONARY STUDENT RE-ORIENTATION

Prior to developing the Student Enhancement & Educational Research Project and subsequent proposal, it became evident to a number of counselors that students’ expectations of college life did not accurately mirror the actual demands of postsecondary education. Although the majority of students entering Santa Monica College are required to and do, indeed, attend a college orientation prior to their first semester of enrollment, the regular orientation program in place in past semesters did not fully address the issues that often lead to students being placed on probation.

The probationary student re-orientation, developed and institutionalized under the auspices of this research project was specifically designed for the needs of academically unsuccessful students. In designing its specific content, the counselors involved accounted for such things as: student history of poor academic performance; commitment to college; academic motivation; major decidedness; understanding of institutional expectations; balancing of school, work, and personal commitments; and the importance of connecting with faculty members and peers.

Upon the conclusion of the fall 2002 semester and once grades were posted, first-time college students being placed on academic or progress probation were invited to participate in a small group (average of 10 students) re-orientation. During these sessions, students had the opportunity to meet with a counselor and other students in similar situations. The re-orientation incorporated active, collaborative, and problem based learning strategies and afforded numerous opportunities for interaction and exchange of dialogue. It was through this exchange that counselors leading these sessions focused students’ attention on conducting a
realistic assessment of their performance in college; their strengths and weaknesses as they related to study
techniques, their involvement in in-and-out of the classroom, family responsibilities, balancing work
commitments, etc. Additionally, using real-life probationary student scenarios during the orientation provided
students with the opportunity to brainstorm in small groups potential solutions to academic, personal, and
social difficulties experienced by college students.

During the discussions, counselors identified a variety of support services offered at Santa Monica College,
including tutoring, counseling, financial aid, and career counseling. Students also were supported in acquiring
the necessary skills to both develop and revise their Student Educational Plans by taking into consideration
the academic and personal problems experienced the previous semester, their majors, academic and career
goals, as well as their need for academic support.

It is our contention that having used this multifaceted approach in the re-orientation sessions that facilitated
the academic and social integration of these students into the college community. While the SEER Project
was initially supported by a Faculty Instructional Improvement grant from the California Community
Colleges Chancellor’s Office, given the outcomes obtained (as will be delineated herein), the SMC Counseling
Department leadership has remained committed to serving this student population by continuing to employ
the re-orientation model as a means to return probationary students to good academic standing. This is
particularly crucial given that the department experienced a reduction of nearly 40% in our adjunct counseling
pool—individuals who had frequent and direct contact with students—due to a drastic budgetary shortfall
experienced by the college.

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT READINESS/MOTIVATION TO CHANGE

Given the importance of providing accurate feedback to students, particularly those on probation, we believe
it is essential that counselors conduct a comprehensive assessment of students’ needs and experiences with
the educational process. To this end, two instruments (described below) were utilized to facilitate this process.
While we recognized the existence of several dozen instruments used in assessing student success, we believe
that between the two utilized, we covered multiple constructs appropriate for a community college population
and for at-risk students. The instruments were used to supplement the regular assessments conducted by
counselors during individual meetings with students.

❖ The College Student Inventory™: is an assessment tool that purports to measure Academic
Motivation, Social Motivation, General Coping, and Receptivity to Support Services. Academic
Motivation includes the following sub-scales: study habits, intellectual interests, academic
confidence, desire to finish college, and attitude toward educators. The value of this instrument for
our usage is in its counseling (versus predictive) application. For example, a student expressing low
academic confidence can be counseled in strategies to increase that sense of academic confidence
such as seeking regular feedback from instructors, developing skills to avoid procrastination, and
developing other tools that will promote a connection and drive for the student to believe that he or
she can perform academically. These are examples of more intrusive advisement—beyond that of
giving information about class scheduling—that will be utilized in counseling probationary students in
this program.

❖ The Mattering Questionnaire: this questionnaire was developed by the two lead researchers for
the project. Its aim was to assess the degree to which students believed that the environment at the
college and their interactions with other students, faculty, and counselors impacted their ability to
succeed and adjust at the college. A psychometric evaluation indicated that the items written
generally clustered on four scales: sense of belongingness, interaction with peers, supportive learning
environment; and mattering to others.
IMPLEMENTATION OF DEVELOPMENTAL ADVISEMENT

Several studies conducted by the Student Services Retention Committee at Santa Monica College (2000) and by the Counseling Department (2001) have indicated that only a small percentage of students consistently met with a counselor to assess their progress and to select a balanced course load.

Historically, when students are placed on probation, the college sends out mailings notifying them of this status. The letter includes a recommendation for the student to meet with a counselor to discuss their status. They are encouraged to develop a contract that outlines the resources available to the student and a recommended course of action for returning to good academic standing. They are also advised that they are limited to enrolling in 12 units the following semester (this was in place in fall 2002, but has now been decreased to 9 units) unless they meet with a counselor and develop a contract. As demonstrated by our probationary rates, however, it was evident that students needed a more aggressive; some would even call it an “intrusive” approach, to informing them of their probationary status and methods of remediation.

As part of this research project, we implemented a structured intrusive/developmental advisement approach to counseling including case management and monitoring of probationary students. During individual meetings with the students subsequent to the re-orientation, counselors conducted a holistic assessment of personal, academic, career, and financial difficulties described by the student. Interventions deemed necessary by the counselor were based on an assessment of the student’s readiness and/or motivation to work toward change. More specifically, these interventions were based on guidelines offered by Hirsch’s Helping Students Succeed (2001). Ultimately, all intervention strategies were centered on the students’ ability or amenability to engage in “inner work” and action work leading to positive change. Issues pertaining to career indecision (which greatly contributes to lack of success), family and financial obligations, transition to college were also discussed in a proactive manner.

PROMOTION OF ENGLISH & MATH SKILLS ASSESSMENT

Research leading to the development of the grant proposal suggested that half the first-time college students attending Santa Monica College did not complete an English/ESL or math assessment test before starting their first semester of college. Specifically, only 48% completed the English assessment and 58% the math assessment. This is of great concern given that assessment of basic skills is paramount to ensuring the proper placement of students in courses most appropriate for their skill levels, and, even more important, counselors must have this information available in order to suggest enrollment into courses other than English. An unfortunate consequence of students’ delaying their math and English assessment tests is that they delay enrollment in English and mathematics courses. A 1998 study conducted by the SMC Office of Institutional Research, and more recently, one conducted by the SMC Presidential Student Retention Task Force (2002), revealed that students who complete English early on in their academic pursuits experience a 30%, overall higher, success rate as compared with their counterparts who put off these courses. In other words, completion of the developmental math and English classes impacts not only those classes, but other courses’ success as well. In contrast, many probationary students have delayed both their English and mathematics assessment and hence, put off enrolling in these critical gateway courses. This project sought to increase the percentage of participating probationary students completing both assessment tests, and use this information in course advisement.

STUDY AND CONTROL GROUPS

While study and control groups can be defined in a variety of situations, including experimental
psychology and medicine, defining these for college settings is difficult. Community colleges in particular face serious limitations in conducting methodologically sound studies. This is particularly true when a treatment cannot be offered to only a specific segment of the student population. The role of community colleges and Matriculation services have been designed to address the needs of all students and to offer them an equal opportunity to participate and to succeed. Thus, designing and assigning students to the study or control groups through random selection is impossible. Keeping this in mind, various strategies were used to assess the impact of the intervention strategies studied. For the purpose of this study, an ex post facto or retrospective design was employed (constituting Control Group 2), in conjunction with a non-random selection of non-participating probationary students (Control Group 1) to conduct quantitative analyses on the study and the control groups.

- **Study Group:** Students attending college for the first time in fall 2002 and subsequently were placed on academic and/or progress probation at the conclusion of the semester AND participated in the probationary student re-orientation conducted in winter 2003.

- **Control Group 1:** Students attending college for the first time in fall 2002 and subsequently were placed on academic and/or progress probation at the conclusion of the semester AND DID NOT participate in the probationary student re-orientation conducted in winter 2003.

- **Control Group 2:** The cohort of first-time college students placed on academic and/or progress probation after completing the fall 1999 semester.

Because of the difficulty in defining a true control group, several methodological techniques were used to assess the impact of intervention strategies.

**POOL FOR RE-ORIENTATION PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION INTO STUDY GROUP**

Of all first-time college students entering Santa Monica College in fall 2002 (N=6,582), 1,114 were initially identified as being on academic probation, progress probation or both. These students were invited to participate in a probationary student re-orientation, of whom 325 voluntarily attended. A more recent analysis on students' academic standing for fall 2002 indicated that 1,607 students ended up on probation after fall 2002. However, given that the re-orientation needed to be conducted in winter 2003, nearly 500 students for whom fall 2002 grades were not available at the time of re-orientation were excluded from participation.

Of the 1,114 students invited to participate, 325 attended (29%)—a yield typical for SMC. As may be seen below, orientation participants differed only slightly from non-participants in reference to progress probation and both.

Our analyses indicated that both the probationary students who attended the re-orientation and those that did not attend were disproportionately Latino students—39%. However, their proportion at the college was merely 26% in fall 2002. With regard to age, probationary students were mostly under the age of 22 (93%).
STATEMENT OF HYPOTHESES

This research study investigated how a set of intervention strategies aided first-time academic and/or progress probation students who entered college for the first time in fall 2002. The impact of these strategies was based on the degree of success our served probationary students experienced subsequent to participating in the interventions. The main hypothesis and sub-hypotheses studied were:

H1: Students participating in academic and/or social activities offered through the Student Enhancement and Educational Research Project will succeed to a statistically significant degree than students in the control group. Specifically:

H1.1: Students will be more likely to succeed when participating in a special orientation program designed to address probationary student needs;

H1.2: The course completion (retention) rates of participating students will be greater than that of students in the control group;

H1.3: The persistence rates (semester to semester) of participating students will be greater than that of students in the control group;

H1.4: Students will be more likely to succeed when intrusive and developmental advising is utilized and where they are closely monitored;

H1.5: Students are more likely to succeed after experiencing a first semester of academic difficulty when support services are made available to them and where they may be mandatory for readmission to the college.

This set of hypotheses was tested against a null (failure) hypothesis to assess if interventions strategies affected student success:
Students participating in academic and/or social activities offered through the Student Enhancement and Educational Research Project will not succeed to a statistically significant degree than students in the control group.

**ASSESSMENT OF INTERVENTION STRATEGIES:**

**OUTCOMES ATTAINED**

The essence of Hypotheses 1.1 through 1.6 focused largely on success rates of probationary students participating in the re-orientation (a necessary condition for inclusion into the study group and described above), compared to those in the control groups (non-orientation participants and fall 1999 probationary students). Success outcomes assessed included course completion rates, grade point average, academic standing, and persistence. The major intervention strategies used to help students become successful were students’ participation in the re-orientation, meetings with counselors where intrusive/developmental advisement was used, and English/Math assessment placement tests completion. The impact of these strategies on success outcomes are discussed in the sections below.

**INFLUENCE OF RE-ORIENTATION PARTICIPATION ON PROBATIONARY OUTCOMES**

Table 1 below, presents academic standing information for students in the study and control groups, as well as for those who were academically successful for the fall 2002, spring 2003, and summer 2003 semesters. As can be seen, students in the study group and those in control group 1, completed the fall 2002 semester with a similar academic standing. Specifically, 80% were on academic probation, 2-5% in progress probation, and 14-18 in both. Most notable are the significant differences in academic standing between the fall 1999 probationary student control group 2, and the fall 2002 probationary study group and control group 1. In fall 1999 only 49% of probationary students were on academic probation compared to the 80% for fall 2002. In contrast, more students were on progress probation in fall 1999 than in fall 2002.

In accounting for only participation status in the probationary student re-orientation conducted in winter 2003, it is clear that those participating and continued to attend SMC decreased their academic probation status to half (40%), whereas those of non-participants’ decreased by 25 percentage points, one semester after (end of spring 2003). Additionally, more of the participants had returned to good academic standing at the conclusion of their second semester (19% vs. 10% for non-participants). While this percentage may not initially describe its true meaning, it should be noted that for students to overcome academic and/or progress probation they must complete courses with high marks. It is often a matter of semesters before they get back to good standing. This is mainly due to the mathematical basis for calculating grade point averages based on the number of units completed and the grade points accumulated in any given semester. For example, if a student completes his/her first semester with 12 units with a 1.0 GPA, completing another 12 units the following semester with a “C” average will not return a student to good academic standing (1.5 GPA). The student must complete these courses with a “B” average if they are to overcome their probationary status (2.0)—a very difficult task. Overcoming probation is not simply based on the acquisition of good study habits. As it has been explained, it is also a mathematical undertaking.
Table 1. Academic Status for Study Group and Control Groups and Study Group Outcomes by Counseling Intervention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Standing</th>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Study Group Only: Number of Times Meeting with Counselor</th>
<th>Overall Academic Standing by Student Group: Study, Control, or Successful Students&lt;sup&gt;4&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
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<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spring 2003</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summer 2003</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Standing</td>
<td>Fall 2002</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spring 2003</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summer 2003</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>1</sup> Student must have attended the counselor-led probationary student re-orientation conducted in winter 2003
<sup>2</sup> Students invited to participate in probationary student re-orientation but did not attend
<sup>3</sup> Fall 1999 probationary student
<sup>4</sup> First-time college students attending Santa Monica College in fall 2002 who were in good academic standing at end of fall
INFLUENCE OF RE-ORIENTATION PARTICIPATION AND COUNSELING ON PROBATIONARY OUTCOMES

The academic standing of re-orientation participating students is partially mediated by their having met and presumably worked with a counselor (also seen in Table 1). Of students on academic probation, those meeting with a counselor two or more times during spring 2003 accounted for only 34% of the academic probation cases, compared to 42% for those who did not meet with a counselor. Additionally, more students returned to good academic standing when meeting with a counselor versus those that did not (24% vs. 18%). Thus, these findings suggest that meeting with a counselor aids students in overcoming academic shortcomings.

INFLUENCE OF RE-ORIENTATION PARTICIPATION ON COURSE COMPLETION, GRADE POINT AVERAGE, AND PERSISTENCE RATES

As the last part of Table 2 indicates, a statistically significant difference exists between students who participated in the re-orientation and those not participating. Specifically, participants were more likely to complete more of their coursework successfully—attaining a grade of “C” or better—after the re-orientation intervention than the latter group: 57% vs. 47% in spring 2003; and 73% vs. 65% in summer 2003. Course completion rates college-wide vary substantially by discipline (50% to mid-70s).

This trend carries over with respect to grade point averages attained. Whereas participating students completed their first semester with a mean GPA of 1.09 in fall 2002, they increased it substantially to 1.53 by the end of spring and summer 2003. That students were able to increase their GPA by half-point is more meaningful when one accounts for the mathematical difficulty in making grade point gains necessary to overcome academic probation.

Finally, participating students also persisted to a significantly higher degree than those not participating. Specifically, the persistence rate for fall 2002 to spring 2003 was 72% vs. 23%—a near 50 percentage point difference. The fall-to-fall persistence rate was also significantly higher: 43% vs. 14%—a 30 percentage point difference.

INFLUENCE OF RE-ORIENTATION PARTICIPATION AND COUNSELING ON COURSE COMPLETION, GRADE POINT AVERAGE, AND PERSISTENCE RATES

As Table 2 also suggests, the trend described above applies here as well. Specifically, students who participated in the re-orientation and also met with a counselor in spring 2003 completed their courses to a significantly higher degree than those not meeting with a counselor: 60-63% vs. 53% in spring 2003, and 75-87% vs. 64% in summer 2003.

Grade point averages also differed substantially for these students: those meeting with a counselor attained a mean spring 2003 GPA of 1.65-1.66 vs. 1.45; and 2.29-2.21 vs. 1.61 in summer 2003.

First semester to second semester persistence was not affected to a great degree for students who attended to the re-orientation. The full effect of persistence occurred for summer 2003 and fall 2003. The latter is particularly enlightening because these unsuccessful probationary students continue to attend Santa Monica College in a proportion equal to that of students college-wide.
ENGLISH/ESL AND MATHEMATICS ASSESSMENT COMPLETION AND PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES BY RE-ORIENTATION PARTICIPATION

The early assessment of students’ writing/reading and math skills is essential if they are to be properly advised by counselors to enroll in coursework appropriate to their reading/writing proficiency. Collectively, only about 50% of students enrolled in fall 2002 had completed the assessment process at Santa Monica College by fall 2002.

In looking just at the fall 2002 first-time college student cohort (Table 3), assessment completion rates varied widely by academic standing. Whereas 80% of students in good academic standing had completed the English assessment test, only 63% of probationary students attending the re-orientation, and 40% of those not attending it had completed the test by the end of fall. Similarly, 76% of successful students had completed the mathematics assessment, but only 65% of re-orientation attendees, and 37% of non-attendees had completed the math assessment.

Objective 6 of our project research proposal sought to increase to 70% the number of probationary students participating in the research study by the end of their first year. This objective was reached. Specifically, 70% of probationary students participating in our re-orientation completed the English assessment and 69% the math assessment; compared to 41% and 38%, respectively, for non-participants. While those attending the re-orientation may be those students who are more highly motivated or concerned, the significant difference between completion percentages is not likely to be entirely attributable to the above reasons. It seems likely therefore, that the intervention itself may have an impact on the subsequent assessment test completion rate.
### Table 2. Performance Indicators for SEER Study and Control Groups by Counseling Intervention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Indicator</th>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Study Group Only (N=324)</th>
<th>Overall Performance Indicators (N=4532)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Once</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Course Completion Rate</strong></td>
<td>Fall 2002</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spring 2003</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summer 2003</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>** Persistence Rate**</td>
<td>Spring 2003</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summer 2003</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fall 2003</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade Point Average Mean (SD)</strong></td>
<td>Fall 1999</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fall 2002</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spring 2003</td>
<td>1.45 (1.22)</td>
<td>1.65 (0.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summer 2003</td>
<td>1.61 (1.35)</td>
<td>2.29 (1.39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cumulative</td>
<td>1.48 (0.93)</td>
<td>1.46 (0.82)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Student must have attended the counselor-led *probationary student re-orientation* conducted in winter 2003
2. Students invited to participate in *probationary student re-orientation* but did not attend
3. Fall 1999 *probationary student*
4. First-time college students attending Santa Monica College in fall 2002 who were in good academic standing at end of fall
Table 3. Assessment Completion Rates by Re-Orientation Attendance Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Re-Orientation Attendance</th>
<th>End of Fall 2002</th>
<th>End of First Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>English Assessment Completion</strong></td>
<td>Attendee and probationary</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Attendee and probationary</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Math Assessment Completion</strong></td>
<td>Successful Students¹</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attendee and probationary</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Attendee and probationary</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Math Assessment Completion</strong></td>
<td>Successful Students¹</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Successful students here are defined as those first-time college students attending SMC in fall 2002 who were in good academic standing by the end of that semester.

IMPACT OF RE-ORIENTATION PARTICIPATION AND ENGLISH/MATHEMATICS ASSESSMENT ON PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

Table 4 presents additional information related to performance outcomes by placement level. In reference to course completion rates by English placement level, significant differences were found among students not completing the test from those that did, and for those that participated in the re-orientation. For example, in spring 2003 and subsequent to the re-orientation intervention, students who completed the test—regardless of placement level—attained a higher course completion rate for that semester (52% - 62%), compared to those who opted not to take the test (49%). The same was true for Math placement level (57% - 62% vs. 48%). These rates were also significantly higher from those of students who did not participate in the re-orientation.

Persistence rates by orientation participation and placement level were also significantly higher for those in the study group, compared to those in control group 1. The persistence rate from fall 2002 to spring 2003 was 81% to 89% for participants who tested, versus 34% to 40% for those that did not participate. The same was true for the math placement exam: 81% to 85% for those that tested and participated in the re-orientation, versus 42% to 44% for those that did not participate.

Grade point averages were also substantially higher for students completing the placement examinations and who either participated in the re-orientation or did not. For example, mean spring 2003 GPAs for participating students who tested in English ranged from 1.48 to 1.71, compared to the 1.22 to 1.40 for those that did not participate in the orientation. The same was true for math: 1.47 to 1.82 for participants and 1.19 to 1.43 for non-participants.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Indicator</th>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>English Assessment / Placement Level</th>
<th>Math Assessment / Placement Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Did Not Test in Fall 2002</td>
<td>Remedial Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Course Completion Rate</strong></td>
<td>Fall 2002</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spring 2003</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summer 2003</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Course Completion Rate</strong></td>
<td>Fall 2002</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spring 2003</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summer 2003</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Persistence Rate</strong></td>
<td>Spring 2003</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summer 2003</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fall 2003</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Persistence Rate</strong></td>
<td>Spring 2003</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summer 2003</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fall 2003</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade Point Average</strong></td>
<td>Fall 2002</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>Spring 2003</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summer 2003</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cumulative</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade Point Average</strong></td>
<td>Fall 2002</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>Spring 2003</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summer 2003</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>1.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cumulative</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1  Student must have attended the counselor-led probationary student re-orientation conducted in winter 2003
2  Students invited to participate in probationary student re-orientation but did not attend
3  Fall 1999 probationary student
4  First-time college students attending Santa Monica College in fall 2002 who were in good academic standing at end of fall
ENGLISH & MATH COURSE COMPLETION RATES

Course completion rates in English and mathematics differ significantly by academic standing. During the write-up of our research study proposal, we determined that the success rate baseline for all students (regardless of academic standing) was 60% in English and 50% in math. Objective 1 of the proposal sought to improve by 10% the number of participating students completing English and Math classes successfully. It should be noted that the comparison that follows should be carefully interpreted, as the original baseline data included both successful and unsuccessful students. A better comparison might be one which contrasts success rates for participating and non-participating students, as well as one which accounts for the increasing percentage of students completing these classes in subsequent semesters.

As a reminder, research project participants were identified only after they had attended the probationary student re-orientation conducted in winter 2003. Prior to this, students had completed one full semester at Santa Monica College. Thus, as seen in Table 5, only 48% of participating students completed English successfully (e.g., grade of “C” or better) and 8% Math, prior to intervention (re-orientation). This success rate was subsequently increased to 65% in English in spring 2003 and to 68% in summer 2003, thus meeting our stated objective. It should be noted that the success rate for these students was higher to a statistically significant degree than that of probationary students not attending the re-orientation.

With regard to math, all probationary students, regardless of whether they participated in this research project or not, successfully completed math courses at a very low rate in their first semester (8%-11%) compared to successful students (56%). By the end of the first year of the grant, the success rate for participating students had been increased to 28% in spring 2003 and to 59% in summer 2003. Note that a significantly higher percentage of non-participating probationary students completed the same courses unsuccessfully.

Whereas it is difficult to draw specific conclusions based on the successful completion of math courses by our students, data presented earlier suggests that having completed a math assessment test significantly predicts students’ likelihood for persisting into subsequent semesters. Based on additional research conducted by the Assessment Center at the college (Tovar, 2003), it has been empirically demonstrated that the math assessment tests do not always discriminate among successful, unsuccessful, and withdrawing students, especially for non-college level courses. That is, students attain similar scores on the tests, regardless of how they complete the class. The Mathematics Department at SMC has been made aware of this fact, and, in conjunction with the English and Counseling Departments has engaged in an ongoing discussion to meet the needs of developmental students (most of whom constituted our study sample). Hence, given that the current placement assessment does not reflect outcome accurately, it is difficult to draw a meaningful conclusion in terms of the out-of-class interventions, of which we were limited to in this study. This is an unfortunate limitation of this study; however even with this limitation, the study group’s math completion rates were higher to a statistically significant degree than for control group 1 students. To conclude, it seems reasonable to assume that merely attending a two hour orientation after being placed on probation does not alone lead to increased success in math.
Table 5. English & Math Course Completion Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Type</th>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>English Course Completion</th>
<th>Math Course Completion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-Orientation</td>
<td>Fall 2002</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Spring 2003</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summer 2003</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-Orientation</td>
<td>Fall 2002</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Participant</td>
<td>Spring 2003</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summer 2003</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful1</td>
<td>Fall 2002</td>
<td>2190</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spring 2003</td>
<td>1866</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summer 2003</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Successful students here are defined as those first-time college students attending SMC in fall 2002 who were in good academic standing by the end of that semester.
LIMITATIONS

As indicated previously, course completion rates for English and mathematics differed significantly by students’ academic standing. During the write-up of our research study proposal, we determined that the success rate baseline for all students (regardless of academic standing) was 60% in English and 50% in math. Objective 1 of the proposal sought to improve by 10% the number of participating students completing English and Math classes successfully.

While the success rate for our participants in English met our objective; we did not however, meet it for math classes. All probationary students, regardless of whether they participated in this research project or not, successfully completed math courses at a very low rate in their first semester (8%-11%) compared to successful students (56%). By the end of the first year of the project, the success rate for participating students had been increased to 28% in spring 2003 and to 59% in summer 2003. Note that a significantly higher percentage of non-participating probationary students completed the same courses unsuccessfully (as seen in Table 5 above).

Whereas it is difficult to draw specific conclusions based on the successful completion of math courses by our students, data presented earlier suggests that having completed a math assessment test significantly predicts students’ likelihood for persisting into subsequent semesters. Based on additional research conducted by the Assessment Center at the college (Tovar, 2003), it has been empirically demonstrated that the math assessment tests do not always discriminate among successful, unsuccessful, and withdrawing students, especially for non-college level courses. That is, students attain similar scores on the tests, regardless of how they complete the class. The Mathematics Department at SMC has been made aware of this fact, and, in conjunction with the English and Counseling Departments has engaged in an ongoing discussion to meet the needs of developmental students (most of whom constituted our study sample). Hence, given that the current placement assessment does not reflect outcome accurately, it is difficult to draw a meaningful conclusion in terms of the out-of-class interventions, of which we were limited to in this study. This is an unfortunate limitation of this study; however even with this limitation, the study group’s math completion rates were higher to a statistically significant degree than for control group 1 students. To conclude, it seems reasonable to assume that merely attending a two hour orientation after being placed on probation does not alone lead to increased success in math.

SEER HONOR AWARD & DISSEMINATION OF FINDINGS

Thanks in great part for the conceptualization of intervention strategies, outcomes, and adaptability of these to other colleges, the SEER program was awarded the 2004 Exemplary Practice Award by the National Council on Student Development, an affiliate of the American Association of Community Colleges. The Council cited our program’s effectiveness, quality, significance to the field, and adaptability of strategies to other colleges, in awarding this honor.

Findings have been disseminated primarily through a variety of presentations at peer-reviewed, professional conferences in the areas or institutional research, counseling, and advisement. Among these have been:

CONTINUED INSTITUTIONALIZATION

While this research project aimed at increasing the success of students on academic and progress probation was initially conceptualized as a short-term program, our success outcomes led us to institutionalize the probationary student re-orientation, now known as **Back to Success** sessions to students and personnel. Starting in summer 2003 and now through winter 2005, the Counseling Department has adopted our model as a means to reach out to this traditionally underserved population. The Dean of Counseling (Brenda Benson) and the Counseling Department chair (Laurie Frederic), along with the faculty leader of the program (Melissa Edson) were instrumental in “selling” the idea to other counseling faculty members and administrators. To date, well over 3,000 students have participated in the orientation sessions, and have now been expanded to not only first-time college students on probation, but to all probationary students. Additionally, they have committed counseling personnel to conduct these activities during winter and summer sessions.