



Designing Curriculum to Support Students

Solano College

Their Approach

Solano College brought ESL and English courses—traditionally in siloed disciplines—together, overhauling its assessment criteria and teaching approach as it embarked on Guided Pathways. This decision reflected the precepts of acceleration; the research showing students acquire language best in the field; the reality that some careers don't require fluency; and the fact that many ESL students benefit from engaging with authentic texts and academic reading and writing tasks. Rather than waiting for all non-native features to be eliminated from ESL students' speech before handing them off to English instructors, Solano decided to create classes that expose ESL students to the themes and discourse of transfer-level English. Their goal was to increase equity and close the achievement gap between native and non-native English speakers.

What They Did

Solano shifted emphasis from students' performance in individual courses to their overall learning processes, with throughput as the measure, says instructor Melissa Reeve. Impelled by AB 705, this change helped Solano faculty recognize that students' language skills continue to develop as they complete a sequence or program. "We no longer isolate one language feature and say, 'The student did everything else but can't do this,'" Reeve says. "Instead, we focus on what students are able to achieve, across the curriculum, with the language skills they have."

Solano extended this logic to certificate, degree, and transfer programs, a change that required redefining English proficiency; the college's English-ready rubric now describes certain kinds of errors as "non-native variants" (that won't hamper students' success in college-level English). Solano argues that context is key; a chef, for example, will need to meet different language requirements from a nurse, chemist, software engineer, or accountant.

What They Learned

Closing the divide between disciplines and setting a new goal of providing students a working, foundational knowledge of English that they will need in their profession revealed that students often can do the writing required. Solano found that holistic writing and language assessment more accurately gauges students' achievements and needs.

Solano found the false divide between disciplines has four components: course content; perceptions of English learners; instructor preparation; and department structure.

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