



Accelerated English Classes Report

Fall 2010-Spring 2012

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Background and Methodology

A recent national study (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006) found that over half of all community college students enroll in a developmental or remedial course at some point in their college careers. Despite the large number of students entering English and math developmental pathways at community colleges, previous research has shown (Attewell et al., 2006; Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010) that a relatively small percentage of students progress to college-level courses in the respective subject.

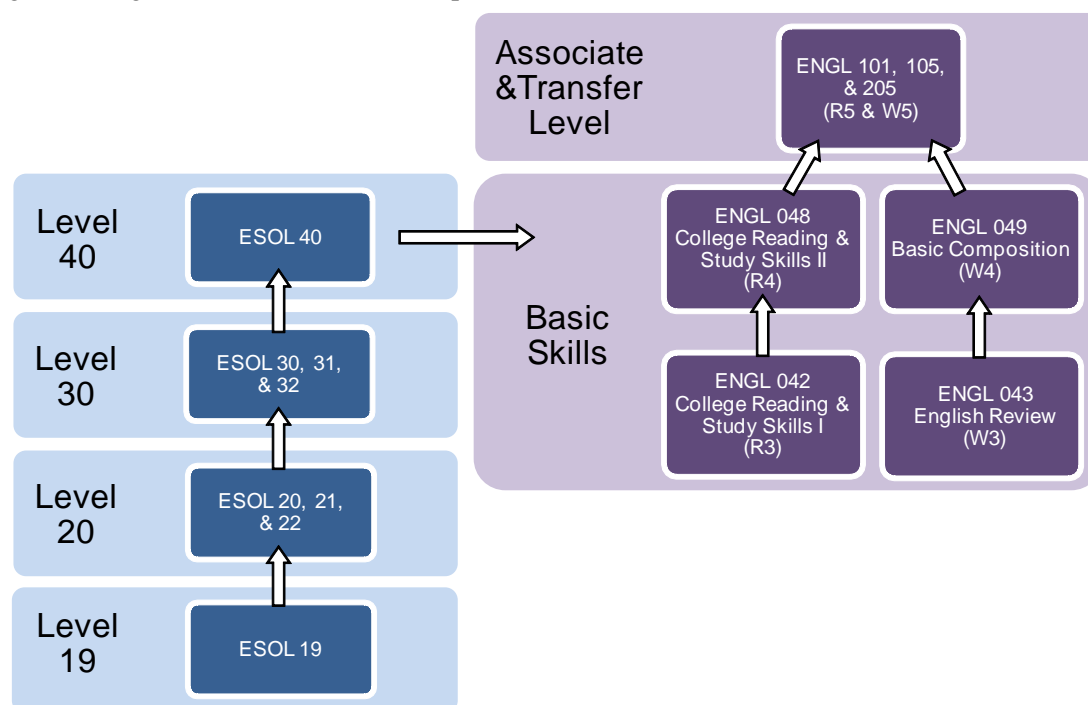
To improve outcomes for developmental students, community colleges have piloted several alternatives to traditional Basic Skills sequences. Edgecombe (2011) identified common alternatives to traditional developmental sequences that include compressed courses (short-term or accelerated), paired or theme-linked courses, contextualized courses, and mainstreaming of developmental students into college courses. Recent studies have linked accelerated Basic Skills pathways to improved sequence completion, persistence, and transfer or college-level English course completion (Bragg, 2009; Hern, 2010; Sheldon and Durdella, 2010). To foster accelerated course development across the state, the California Acceleration Project offers training and support to participating community colleges, including City College and Mesa College.

At San Diego City College and Mesa College, over 60% of first-time students who complete the assessment test place into Basic Skills writing courses (SDCCD Office of Institutional Research and Planning, 2011a; SDCCD Office of Institutional Research and Planning, 2011b). In an effort to improve Basic Skills student success, City College and Mesa College began offering English 265B, a pilot accelerated Basic Skills English course, in Fall 2010. The goal of the course is to minimize exit points along the developmental (Basic Skills) English pathway and increase the percentage of students that progress to, and succeed in, transfer-level English.

In Fall 2011, San Diego City College and Mesa College adopted the accelerated course model. The course is open to students at all reading and writing placement levels and combines a series of four Basic Skills courses into a one-semester preparatory course designed to provide the skills necessary to produce successful college-level papers in all subject areas. The course focuses on the thematic perspective, within which students learn to develop arguments and strengthen critical thinking, reading, organizing, and writing skills at an accelerated pace.

Students who complete English 265B are eligible to enroll in transfer-level composition courses, English 101 and English 105. In contrast, the non-accelerated Basic Skills reading sequence includes two three-unit courses, English 042 (College Reading and Study Skills I) and English 048 (College Reading and Study Skills II); the non-accelerated Basic Skills writing sequence includes two three-unit courses, English 043 (English Review) and English 049 (Basic Composition). Thus, a student who places at reading level 30 (R3) and writing level 30 (W3) must complete four courses (English 042, English 043, English 048, and English 049) in order to enroll in a transfer-level composition course, English 101 or English 105. Figure 1 illustrates the non-accelerated Basic Skills reading and writing pathways to transfer level English at City College and Mesa College.

Figure 1. English and ESOL Course Sequence Relative to Placement as of Fall 2008.



In Fall 2010 and Spring 2011, three sections of English 265B were offered at Mesa College and one section was offered at City College each semester. A total number of 212 students enrolled in the sections. To determine if students in the accelerated Basic Skills English pathway had greater rates of success in Basic Skills and transfer English, a study was conducted in summer 2011 (SDCCD Office of Institutional Research and Planning, 2011c). The report compared course success, retention, term persistence, and subsequent transfer English course enrollment and success for accelerated (English 265B) and non-accelerated (English 042, English 043, English 048, and English 049) Basic Skills English students.

In Fall 2011, four sections were offered at Mesa College and two sections were offered at City College. A total of 149 students enrolled in the sections. No sections of English 265B were scheduled in Spring 2012. The present study was undertaken to assess the preliminary outcomes of the accelerated Basic Skills English course in Fall 2011 and moderate-term outcomes of the accelerated Basic Skills English course for the previous two cohorts (Fall 2010 and Spring 2011). Demographic, assessment, enrollment, and grade data were obtained from the SDCCD information system. Gender, ethnicity, age, units attempted, cumulative units completed, reading placement level, writing placement level, Basic Skills English course success and retention, term persistence, and transfer level English course enrollment and success were compared for students enrolled in accelerated Basic Skills English (English 265B) and non-accelerated Basic Skills English (English 042, English 043, English 048, and English 049).

Highlight of the Findings

- The present study was intended to build upon previous findings. The 2011 study of the City College and Mesa College accelerated English program showed more positive outcomes for the Fall 2010 cohort than the Spring 2011 cohort (SDCCD Office of Institutional Research and Planning, 2011c). During facilitated discussions with the English faculty of the findings from the 2011 study, accelerated English faculty and counselors at City College indicated that the difference in outcomes may have been due in part to the targeted recruitment of students for the accelerated English course in its first semester of implementation (Fall 2010). This pseudo-screening process may have resulted in the enrollment of students who were either better prepared and/or had learning styles that were complementary to the accelerated learning approach.
- Overall, success rates were equal for students in accelerated and non-accelerated Basic Skills English courses; however, Basic Skills course retention rates and term persistence rates were slightly higher for students in accelerated courses than for students in non-accelerated courses.
- Basic Skills course success and retention patterns of accelerated and non-accelerated students varied somewhat by student skill levels. Accelerated students who assessed at lower reading levels and higher writing levels succeeded at greater rates than their non-accelerated peers, but accelerated students with higher reading levels and lower writing levels succeeded at lower rates than their non-accelerated peers.
- The study also revealed that students who passed the accelerated course had higher rates of enrollment in a transfer English course (English 101/105) the following semester, but had lower rates of success in the transfer English course. The findings of the present study are consistent with the findings reported in the 2011 study (SDCCD Office of Institutional Research and Planning, 2011c) in which accelerated students in the Fall 2010 cohort and the Spring 2011 cohort had greater rates of enrollment but lower rates of success in the transfer English course.
- Results from the current report support national research on accelerated learning approach which indicates that accelerated courses eliminate exit points along the course sequence, thereby increasing the likelihood that Basic Skills students go on to enroll in transfer-level English (Hern, 2010). However, the present study's findings deviate somewhat from the existing literature which has shown higher rates of success for accelerated students in Basic Skills English courses (Sheldon & Durdella, 2010) and in transfer English courses (Hern, 2010).
- The accelerated program is still a relatively new program at City College and Mesa College; thus the present study was exploratory in nature. As such, the present study focused on preliminary outcomes for students in accelerated and non-accelerated courses. The study did not account for a variety of factors related to student success. Therefore, the results of the present study should be interpreted with caution. In addition, the present study did not address program implementation, so future studies should attempt to describe the program operation at each of the colleges.

Operational Definitions

Successful Course Completion Rate: The percentage of students who complete a course with a grade of A, B, C, or P out of total census enrollments. Tutoring, non-credit, and cancelled classes are excluded.

Retention Rate: The percentage of students who complete a course with a grade of A, B, C, D, F, P, NP, I or RD out of total census enrollments. Tutoring and cancelled classes are excluded.

Term Persistence Rates: The percentage of official census enrolled students in a fall term who received a grade notation of A, B, C, D, F, P, NP, I or RD and who enrolled in at least one course in the subsequent spring term and received a grade notation of A, B, C, D, F, P, NP, I or RD.

Subsequent Enrollment: The number of students who successfully complete a predecessor course and then enroll in the subsequent course within a designated period of time. Cancelled classes are excluded.

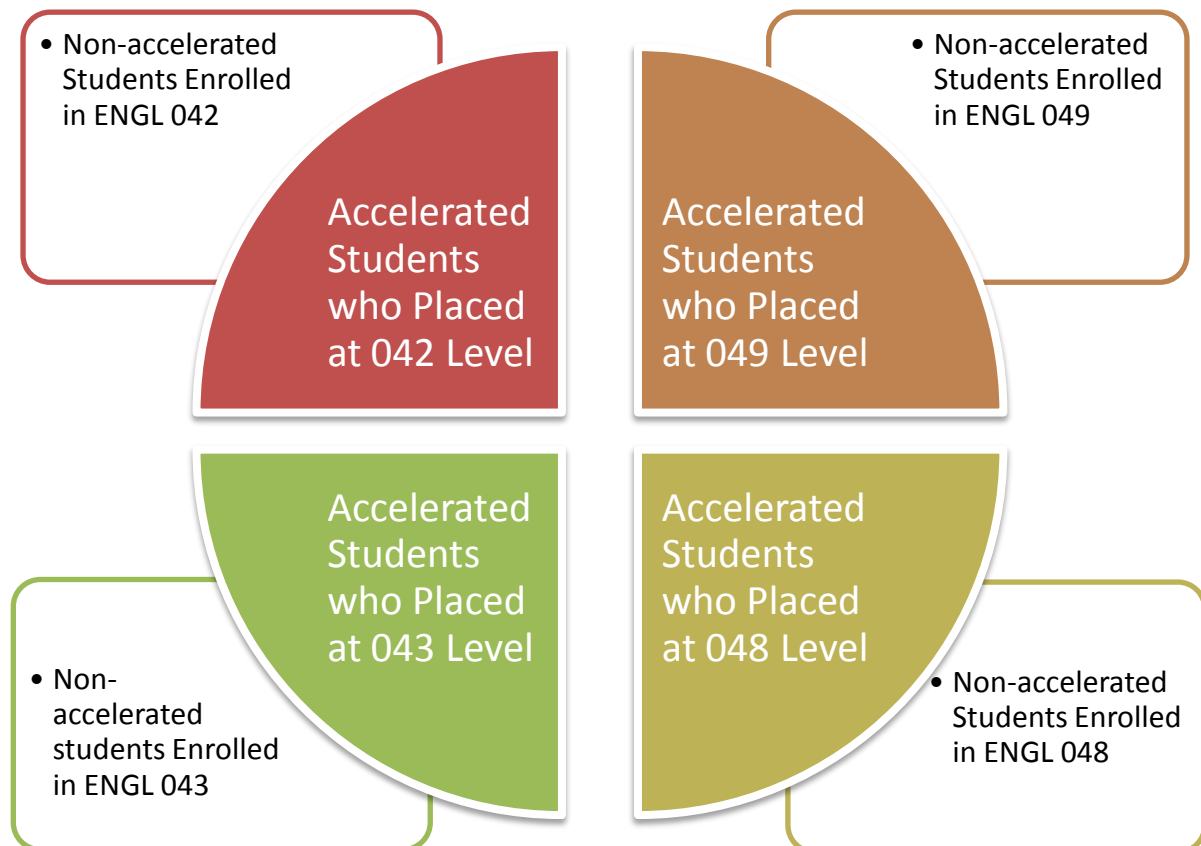
Subsequent Success: The number of students who successfully complete a predecessor course with a grade of A, B, C or P and then subsequently enroll in the subsequent course within a designated period of time and complete the subsequent course successfully with a grade of A, B, C or P. Cancelled classes are excluded.

Summary of the Findings

The results of the 2011 accelerated English study were somewhat inconclusive and varied by cohort (Office of Institutional Research and Planning, 2011c). Accelerated English students had positive outcomes in Fall 2010 (success, retention, and persistence) compared to their non-accelerated peers; however, in Spring 2011, success and retention were lower for accelerated students than for non-accelerated students. Furthermore, Fall 2010 accelerated students demonstrated higher transfer English enrollment rates, but lower successful transfer English course completion rates than their non-accelerated peers.

The present study examined profile and outcome information for students enrolled in accelerated Basic Skills English and non-accelerated Basic Skills English courses. Success rates, retention rates, persistence rates, and transfer level English course subsequent enrollment and success were disaggregated by reading and writing skill level for accelerated students to account for differences in entering skill levels. Each of these groups was compared to students enrolled in the corresponding non-accelerated Basic Skills English course. Figure 2 summarizes the specific comparison groups for student outcomes by skill level.

Figure 2. Student Outcomes Comparison Groups



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It should be noted that one student may enroll in multiple non-accelerated Basic Skills English courses (reading and writing); thus, overall success data are duplicated for non-accelerated students but unduplicated for accelerated students. Outcomes disaggregated by assessment level are unduplicated within the assessment level for both accelerated and non-accelerated students.

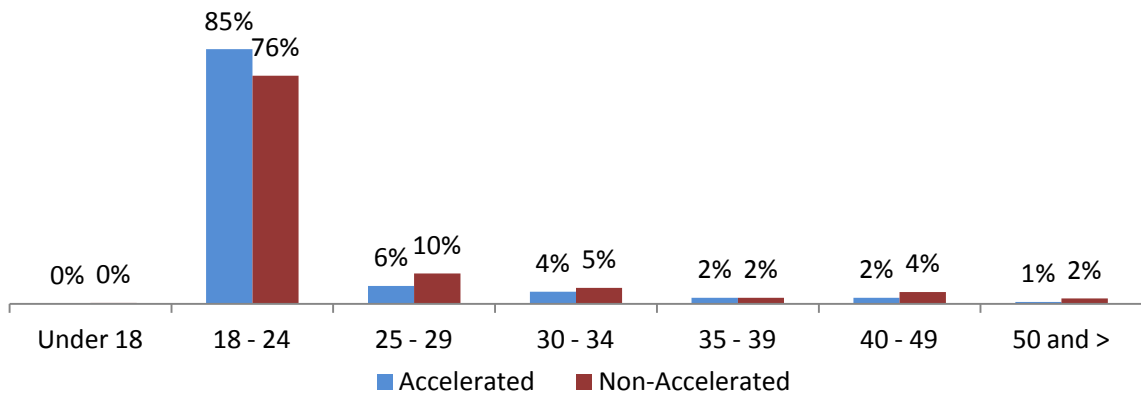
Student Profile

In Fall 2011, 149 students enrolled in accelerated Basic Skills English (English 265B); 3,596 students enrolled in traditional, non-accelerated Basic Skills English courses, accounting for 4,421 enrollments.

Demographics

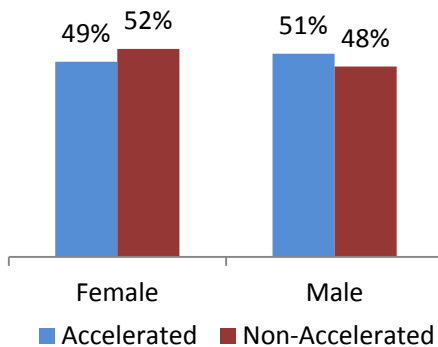
When demographics for the Fall 2011 accelerated cohort were compared to those of the non-accelerated Fall 2011 cohort, some notable differences emerged. For example, accelerated students tended to be slightly younger than non-accelerated students. The overwhelming majority of accelerated students were between ages 18-24 (85%), a slightly higher figure than that of the non-accelerated students (76%). (See Figure 3.)

Figure 3. Students' Age by Accelerated and Non-Accelerated Courses (Fall 2011).



In addition, compared to the non-accelerated cohort, the accelerated cohort had a slightly higher proportion of male students (51% compared to 48%) and a slightly lower proportion of female students (49% compared to 52%). (See Figure 4.)

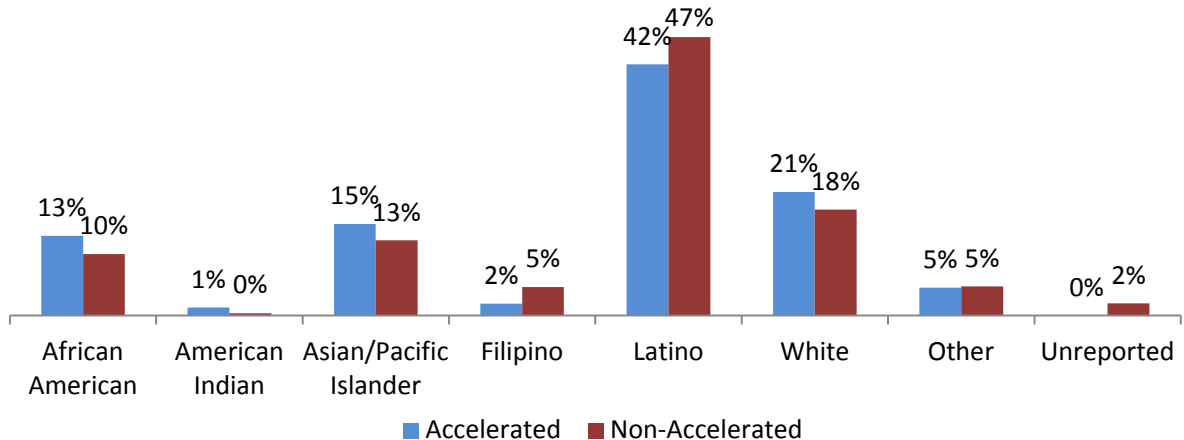
Figure 4. Students' Gender by Accelerated and Non-Accelerated Courses (Fall 2011).



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Ethnicity also varied somewhat between the two groups. Latino students comprised a slightly smaller proportion of the accelerated cohort (42%) than the non-accelerated cohort (47%), while African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, and White students comprised slightly larger proportions of the accelerated cohort than the non-accelerated cohort. (See Figure 5.)

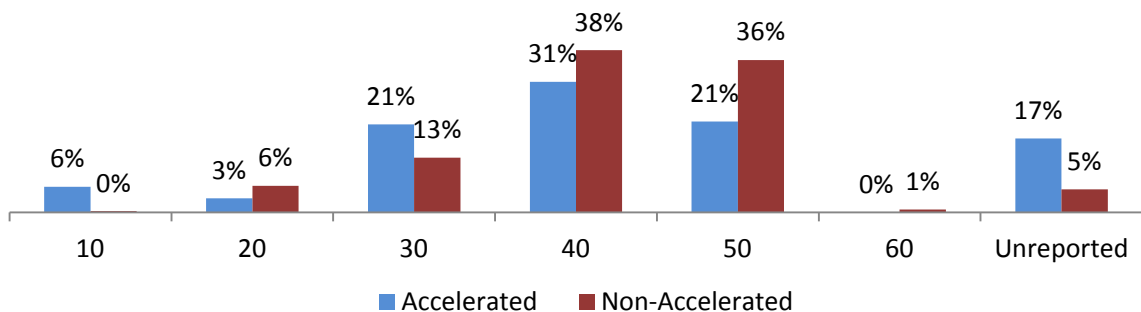
Figure 5. Students' Ethnicity by Accelerated and Non-Accelerated Courses (Fall 2011).



Reading Placement Level

In Fall 2011, accelerated and non-accelerated students differed somewhat in their entering reading skill levels. Approximately one third (31%) of the Fall 2011 accelerated students placed at reading placement level 40 (R4), compared to 38% of non-accelerated students. About one-fifth of accelerated students (21%) placed at level 50 (R5), and the same percentage (21%) placed at level 30 (R3). Contrastingly, over one in three non-accelerated students (36%) placed at reading level 50 (R5), and just 13% placed at reading level 30 (R3). (See Figure 6.)

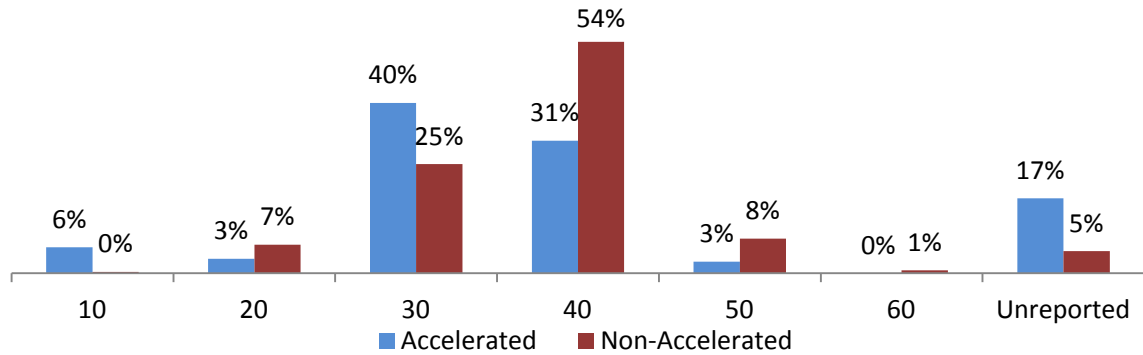
Figure 6. Reading Placement for Fall 2011 Cohort.



Writing Placement Level

Fall 2011 accelerated and non-accelerated students also differed in their writing skill levels. The largest percentage of accelerated students (40%) placed at writing placement level 30 (W3), compared to just 25% of non-accelerated students. Only 31% of accelerated students placed at writing level 40 (W4), compared to 54% of non-accelerated students. (See Figure 7.)

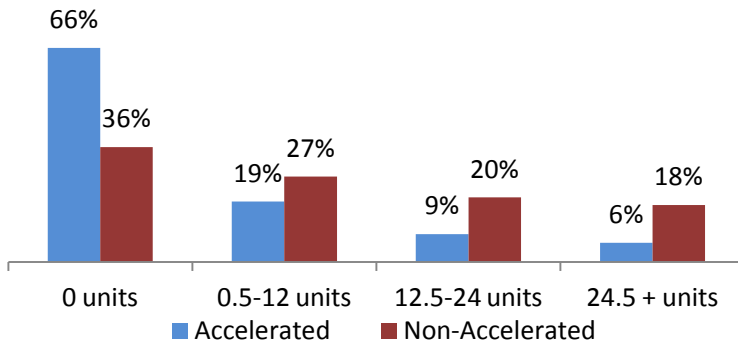
Figure 7. Writing Placement for Fall 2011 Cohort.



Cumulative Units Earned Prior to Enrolling in Basic Skills English

A far greater percentage of non-accelerated Basic Skills English students than accelerated students had earned units prior to the start of the Fall 2011 semester. Put another way, two in three accelerated students (66%) had earned no units prior to enrolling in Fall 2011, compared to just over one in three non-accelerated students (36%). (See Figure 8.) This indicates that accelerated students might be less experienced and skilled as college students compared to non-accelerated Basic Skills English students.

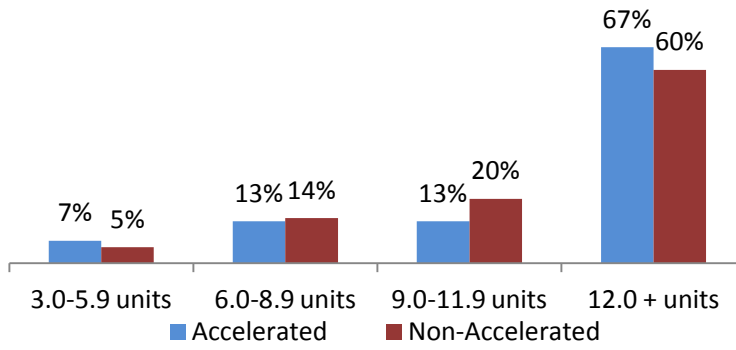
Figure 8. Students' Units Earned Prior to Fall 2011.



Units Attempted

Two in three accelerated students (67%) were enrolled full time (12 or more units) in Fall 2011, compared to 60% of non-accelerated students. (See Figure 9.)

Figure 9. Students' Units Attempted – Fall 2011.



Student Outcomes

Successful Course Completion, Retention, and Persistence

In Fall 2011, students who enrolled in the accelerated course (English 265B) and students who enrolled in the non-accelerated courses (English 042, English 043, English 048, and English 049) were equally likely to succeed in the course overall (69% each); however, students in the accelerated course had slightly higher retention rates than students in non-accelerated Basic Skills English courses (90% and 86%, respectively). Overall, term persistence rates were also slightly higher for students in accelerated courses (84%) than for students in non-accelerated courses (81%).

When success, retention, and persistence were disaggregated by reading and writing placement levels, some key differences emerged. Accelerated students who placed at reading level 30 (R3) had a higher success rate than students who enrolled in the reading level 30 course, English 042. A similar pattern was observed for accelerated students who placed at writing level 40 (W4) and students who enrolled in the corresponding writing course, English 049. (See Figure 10.) The reverse was observed for accelerated students who placed at reading level 40 (R4) and for accelerated students who placed at writing level 30 (W3). Retention rates followed a similar pattern, except that accelerated students who placed at reading level 40 (R4) were retained at the same rate as students enrolled in English 048. (See Figure 11.)

When persistence was disaggregated by skill level, accelerated students generally had higher fall-to-spring persistence rates than their non-accelerated peers. Accelerated students who placed at writing level 40 (W4) were an exception to this trend; their persistence rates were slightly lower than those of non-accelerated students. (See Figure 12.)

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Figure 10. Success Rates by Accelerated and Non-Accelerated Courses (Fall 2011).

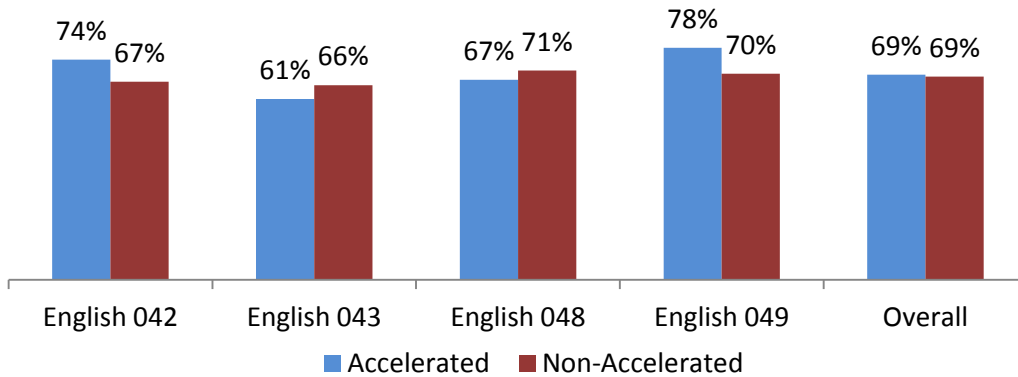


Figure 11. Retention Rates by Accelerated and Non-Accelerated Courses (Fall 2011).

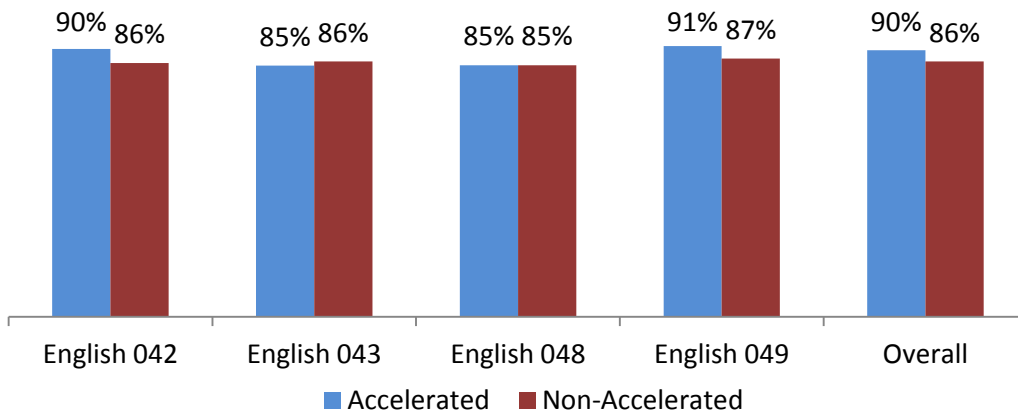
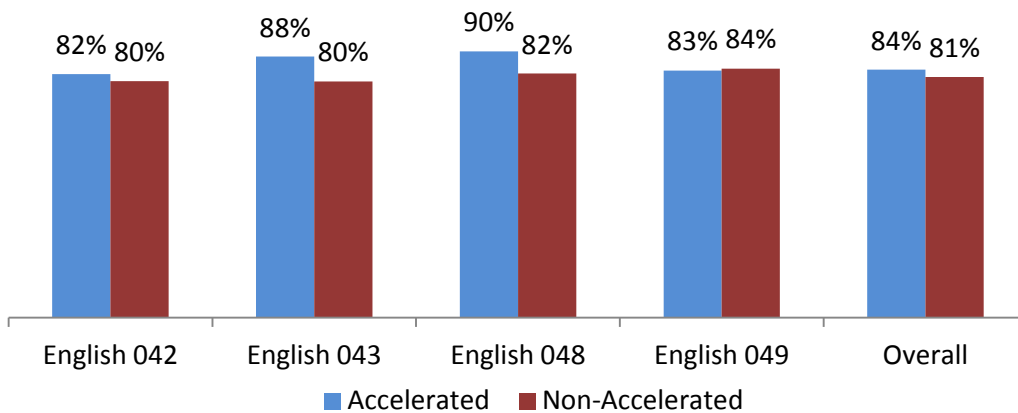


Figure 12. Persistence Rates by Accelerated and Non-Accelerated Courses (Fall 2011).



Subsequent Enrollment and Success

Subsequent enrollment in transfer-level English (English 101 or English 105) was examined for students who successfully completed the accelerated Basic Skills English course (English 265B) or at least one of the non-accelerated Basic Skills English courses (English 042, English 042, English 048, or English 049). Subsequent enrollment was examined for each of the following cohorts:

- Fall 2010 (enrollment in English 101 or 105 within three semesters)
- Spring 2011 (enrollment in English 101 or 105 within two semesters)
- Fall 2011 (enrollment in English 101 or 105 within one semester)

On the whole, a much larger proportion of the accelerated cohorts than the non-accelerated cohorts went on to enroll in a transfer level English course (English 101 or 105). However, of those who went on to enroll in transfer-level English, accelerated students generally had lower success rates in transfer English than non-accelerated students (75% compared to 82%). (See Tables 1 through 6.)

When disaggregated by writing and reading placement levels, subsequent enrollment patterns resembled the overall pattern: a greater percentage of accelerated students enrolled in transfer-level English during the designated time period. However, success in transfer English varied by placement level and cohort. For example, among Fall 2010 cohorts, accelerated students who placed at reading level 40 (R4) or writing level 40 (W4) had slightly higher success rates in transfer English than comparison, non-accelerated students; however, the reverse was true for students who placed at writing level 30 (W3) or reading level 30 (R3). (See Tables 1 and 2.) This trend did not hold for the Spring 2011 or Fall 2011 cohorts. In fact, for Spring 2011 students, transfer English success rates were lower for accelerated students than for comparison students at all placement levels. (See Tables 3 and 4.) There was no discernible pattern in transfer success rates by placement level for Fall 2011 students. (See Tables 5 and 6).

Table 1. Accelerated Students' Subsequent Enrollment and Success in English 101 or 105 by Placement Levels (Fall 2010 Accelerated cohort).

Accelerated	Cohort Size	Subsequent Enrollment		Subsequent Success	
English 042 Level	17	14	82%	10	71%
English 043 Level	31	27	87%	17	63%
English 048 Level	35	29	83%	25	86%
English 049 Level	39	32	82%	27	84%
Overall	84	67	80%	50	75%

Note. Overall figures are unduplicated for accelerated students.

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Table 2. Non-Accelerated Students' Subsequent Enrollment and Success in English 101 or 105 by Courses enrolled in Fall 2010.

Non-Accelerated	Cohort Size	Subsequent Enrollment		Subsequent Success	
English 042 Level	420	152	36%	124	82%
English 043 Level	767	289	38%	239	83%
English 048 Level	790	512	65%	408	80%
English 049 Level	1,363	1,021	75%	843	83%
Overall	3,340	1,974	59%	1,614	82%

Note. Overall figures are duplicated for non-accelerated students.

Table 3. Accelerated Students' Subsequent Enrollment and Success in English 101 or 105 by Placement Levels (Spring 2011 Accelerated cohort).

Accelerated	Cohort Size	Subsequent Enrollment		Subsequent Success	
English 042 Level	12	9	75%	5	56%
English 043 Level	19	11	58%	7	64%
English 048 Level	22	17	77%	10	59%
English 049 Level	20	17	85%	10	59%
Overall	58	39	67%	26	67%

Note. Overall figures are unduplicated for accelerated students.

Table 4. Non-Accelerated Students' Subsequent Enrollment and Success in English 101 or 105 by Courses enrolled in Spring 2011.

Non-Accelerated	Cohort Size	Subsequent Enrollment		Subsequent Success	
English 042 Level	375	62	17%	43	69%
English 043 Level	571	106	19%	77	73%
English 048 Level	736	377	51%	317	84%
English 049 Level	1,395	831	60%	666	80%
Overall	3,077	1,376	45%	1,103	80%

Note. Overall figures are duplicated for non-accelerated students.

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Table 5. Accelerated Students' Subsequent Enrollment and Success in English 101 or 105 by Placement Levels (Fall 2011 Accelerated cohort).

Accelerated	Cohort Size	Subsequent Enrollment		Subsequent Success	
English 042 Level	23	19	83%	14	74%
English 043 Level	36	26	72%	18	69%
English 048 Level	31	25	81%	17	68%
English 049 Level	36	30	83%	23	77%
Overall	103	74	72%	54	73%

Table 6. Non-Accelerated Students' Subsequent Enrollment and Success in English 101 or 105 by Courses enrolled in Fall 2011.

Non-Accelerated	Cohort Size	Subsequent Enrollment		Subsequent Success	
English 042 Level	353	10	3%	7	70%
English 043 Level	551	16	3%	11	69%
English 048 Level	616	301	49%	231	77%
English 049 Level	1,006	720	72%	551	77%
Overall	2,526	1,047	41%	800	76%

Conclusions and Recommendations

The current analysis provides preliminary data on a relatively new program aimed at improving Basic Skills English student success. As with any research, the present study includes a number of limitations. For example, the findings are based on a limited number of students who self-selected into either accelerated or traditional, non-accelerated Basic Skills English courses, presenting the possibility of a self-selection bias. In addition, the data presented in this report are based on a relatively small number of students, due in part to the relative newness of the accelerated English course at City College and Mesa College. Thus, the findings of the study should be interpreted with caution.

The present study aimed to describe short and long-term outcomes for students enrolled in the accelerated Basic Skills English course and compare them to those students enrolled in non-accelerated Basic Skills English courses. The results of the present study build upon previous findings on accelerated courses and reveal some promising outcomes for acceleration at City College and Mesa College. The existing literature has shown that accelerated students have higher Basic Skills course completion rates, higher persistence rates, and higher rates of transfer English course enrollment and completion (Bragg, 2009; Hern, 2010; Sheldon & Durdella, 2010). The results of the present study are consistent with the findings in the 2011 study conducted by the SDCCD Office of Institutional Research and Planning (2011c) and somewhat consistent with previous research. Accelerated students had greater rates of persistence and enrollment in transfer English than non-accelerated students; however, the accelerated students did not demonstrate higher rates of Basic Skills or transfer English course completion.

During the facilitated discussion on the findings with the faculty members teaching the accelerated English classes at City and Mesa, faculty shared the different strategies they used each semester. City faculty indicated that specific strategies were implemented with the initial accelerated cohort (Fall 2010) at City. The faculty first met with administrators to discuss technical aspects of the accelerated course—who it is open to, how it differs from our traditional basic skills offerings, and so forth. A counselor was assigned to work with students who showed interest in the course. The faculty members met with the counselor several times throughout summer 2010 and before fall 2010 to go through the syllabi, assessment, and learning approach, and to talk about the qualities a successful student might need.

The City College faculty indicated that the Fall 2010 accelerated English students had a good understanding about the nature of the course. Flyers illustrating the difference between the accelerated course and the traditional offerings were made to students as well. However, in Spring 2011, there were no counselors assigned to help students determine if the course was right for them. According to the faculty, students enrolled in the class until it closed. However, some of the students saw the flyer, whereas some might have heard about the accelerated class in a counseling session. The faculty later discovered that very few students who enrolled knew that the course was accelerated and what that meant. In Fall 2011, students had support via the First Year Experience (FYE) program and had a better idea of what the class involved.

Contrastingly, Mesa faculty indicated that several students were informed of the accelerated course by word of mouth, and that counselor screening of students was not a major factor in enrolling students in the course. Additionally, the Mesa faculty shared that a number of students in the accelerated English course were international students and former second language learners. Mesa faculty also noted that the Spring 2011 cohort included a particularly large number of late enrollers, or “crashers,” which may indicate that these students were less aware of the requirements of the accelerated course and, thus, experienced more difficulty in the class than other cohorts.

The Mesa faculty found the reading and writing skill level differences between accelerated and non-accelerated students to be intuitive, given that one of the aims of the accelerated English class is to eliminate exit points for students placing two or more levels below transfer in reading and writing. Furthermore, the Mesa faculty indicated that the accelerated English course includes a rigorous curriculum and that texts used in some sections of the class were the same as those used in transfer level English courses. There was consensus among the Mesa faculty that many students in the accelerated course were challenged by the rigorous curriculum, but that a number of students also performed at higher levels in accordance with the course’s expectations.

In the future, as more data become available, research should be conducted to examine accelerated course enrollment as one of many factors related to successful Basic Skills course completion, persistence, and success in subsequent courses. As suggested by Bailey and colleagues (2010), a rigorous study of developmental education interventions should examine the impact of interventions in the context of other student and institutional variables, such as support services, orientation, assessment, and recruitment. This should be pursued in subsequent studies of accelerated courses at City College and Mesa College. In addition, future analysis should identify other possible outcomes of the accelerated program, such as social support and academic engagement. Finally, the accelerated program at City and Mesa is still in its infancy; thus, future studies should attempt to describe the program implementation at both colleges and identify effective strategies and practices for future iterations of the program.

Student success is complex and driven by many different institutional and individual factors that may have contributed to the present study’s findings. Future research should attempt to address the limitations of this report by including multiple variables in the student success model and examining the implementation of the accelerated courses at each college.

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