

# Planning for Success in Gateway Courses: Curriculum Alignment of English, Math, & Economics

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## Project Background

This project reviewed the alignment of our gateway English and Mathematics courses with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in order to insure college courses build on what high school students already know and can do. Also included in this review process was our core Economics course, ECON 2106, Principles of Microeconomics. The original goals for this project were

- subcommittees to become familiar with the Common Core Standards and current Bainbridge State College standards for each of the three courses;
- identify the gaps between the two sets of standards;
- align the two sets of standards;
- train newly aligned standards with non-committee faculty

## Synopsis

We proposed to align our gateway English and Mathematics courses with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) so that college courses build on what high school students already know and can do. Also included in this alignment process was our core Economics course, ECON 2106, Principles of Microeconomics, which we plan to offer as an ACCEL course at Thomas County Central High School and need to align with their end-of-course test. Economics is recognized as a difficult gateway course, and the importance of aligning standards is imperative to ensure students successfully complete the course at both the high school and college levels as well as the end-of-the-course test.

## Impact on College Completion

This project has provided substantial insight into the Common Core standards and how the similarities and differences may impact students new to Bainbridge State College. College faculty reviewing the standards identified standards common to both the college and the high school courses. The college faculty spent a large portion of the project timeline meeting and reviewing the Common Core Standards, and also meeting with the P12 consultants to discuss the standards. The faculty were pleased to discover significant parallels between the two sets of standards in all three courses. Due to the alignment of the standards expectations of college level courses will be more familiar to students in the gateway courses. As students transition easily from high school to the college level they are likely to be more successful in completing their college degree. Further, they will connect college coursework with key concepts in their high school curricula which also contributes to increased success.

## Key Findings

The subcommittees found the work of this project very interesting and welcomed the opportunity to communicate with P12 consultants about the expectations and accomplishments of traditional college students. However, the comparison of standards was a rather challenging part of the project as high school courses utilize various sets of standards for one. This was especially challenging with English and math, while Economics was less complex.

This project was completed by three small groups, English, mathematics, and Economics with eleven college faculty contributing and two P12 consultants. The small groups met independently five to six times to review and compare the CCSS and then to revise course standards if necessary. This project will continue to impact students for many years as faculty seek consistency in expectations within specific disciplines.

## Conclusion

Key successes include the collaboration between BSC faculty and the P12 consultants as well as a first-time, documented review and comparison of the CCSS and college level course standards for three courses. This opportunity provided the faculty with information about the parallels of their own course objectives and those of the Common Core. Challenges were narrowing the broad spectrum of course objectives within the Common Core. This consumed a great deal of the small committees' time as the differentiation of courses is different than on the college level. The alignment of standards proved to be simply a matter of tweaking wording and clarity of the college course standards.

This project was a pilot project for our college, and one that will continue as we move forward. This work will be especially important as high schools and colleges continue to collaborate in ACCEL programs. Projects similar to this one also break through the barriers separating high school and college instructors as they work to bridge the transition from high school to college and to make that transition more seamless for students. High school instructors hone their knowledge of what is expected of students evolving to college and college instructors have increased information on which to draw from as they construct their courses in a way so as to build on that knowledge. Committees found they needed only to reorganize and reformat information in order to make the course standards align with the Common Core.

## Future Directions

The sustainability of this project is necessary as it is a relatively inexpensive project and its outcomes are beneficial to a substantial number of faculty and students. The prospective of sharing this knowledge among institutions as well as making it scalable for implementation within other institutions is phenomenal as the Common Core Standards are utilized across the state. The continued monitoring and encouragement for the project to continue within our institution is a priority.

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