

Project Success
Fall 1996 – Spring 2000
Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Academic Services

Introduction

Project Success started at Grossmont College in 1989 with one pair of linked classes: English Fundamentals and College Reading (English 103 and 105, respectively). Research conducted by English Professor Dr. Mary Donnelly showed that linking certain classes to create student “learning communities” promoted student success and retention. The premise behind linked classes is that integrating the content of the two courses appears to help students see the connection between the curricula and helps promote communication and collaboration between students. A 1995 study conducted by the Office of Research, Planning, and Academic Services confirmed earlier research findings. The study found that students in Project Success classes had higher success, retention, persistence, and transition rates than comparable students in equivalent non-Project Success classes.

Project Success has since been expanded to over 15 pairs of linked classes, pairing an English composition course with a reading course (English 103/105 and the next level course, English 110/106) or a composition course (English 120 or 124) with a cross-discipline subject course (e.g., humanities, philosophy, speech, history). Of those linked classes, only the English composition-reading linkages provided enough students to conduct analyses. The present report provides the findings of a current examination of these linked courses. It should be noted that participation in Project Success is voluntary. Therefore, any differences in performance outcomes may be attributable to factors (e.g., student motivation) unrelated to the program.

Methodology

The current study examines the past four years of program data – Fall, 1996 to Spring, 2000. Two types of data were examined: demographic/background characteristics and student performance measures. Demographic/background characteristics include gender, racial/ethnic group, age, and student status distributions. Student performance measures include semester grade point average (GPA), proportion of semester units completed, English course success, English course retention, semester-to-semester persistence, transition to the next level English course, and success in the next level English course. Comparisons were made between two groups:

1. Project Success students – students enrolled in both linked classes (English 103/105 or English 110/106; $n=2,083$),
2. Non-Project Success students – students enrolled in a non-Project Success section of English 103 or English 110 taught by the same instructor who teaches a Project Success section of the same course ($n=1,328$).

In order to eliminate the possibility of differences in student outcomes due to course and instructor variance, students in both groups are enrolled in the same English course (but a different section) and taught by the same instructor.

Findings

The study's findings are presented in three sections. The first section addresses the demographic characteristics of the two groups of students. Next, performance outcomes for students in the English 103/105 linked courses are presented and compared to similar students in non-linked courses. Finally, performance outcomes are examined for students in English 110/106.

Demographic characteristics

Table 1 displays the demographic/background characteristics of students in the two groups. Females comprised a higher proportion of the Project Success group (59.3%) compared to

Table 1
Demographic/Background Characteristic of Project Success
and Non-Project Success Students
(In Percent)

	Project Success (<u>n</u> =2,083)	Non-Project Success (<u>n</u> =1,328)
Gender:		
female	59.3	54.8
male	40.7	45.2
Racial/ethnic group:		
Asian	8.7	10.3
Black	10.8	8.5
Hispanic	20.5	18.3
Other	6.6	6.3
White	53.4	56.6
Age:		
Under 20	56.0	45.3
20 - 24	19.9	26.6
25 - 29	9.5	10.8
30 - 49	14.2	16.2
50+	0.4	1.1
Student status:		
first-time college	41.1	32.3
first-time transfer	7.5	9.6
returning	6.2	8.6
high school	0.9	0.5
continuing	44.3	48.9

the non-Project Success group (54.8%). The Project Success group had a slightly higher proportion of Hispanic (20.5%) and Black (10.8%) students compared to students with the non-Project Success group (18.3% and 8.5%, respectively). Project Success students were also younger (56.0% under 20 years compared to 45.3% for non-Project Success students) and more likely to be first-time college students (41.1% compared to 32.3% for non-Project Success students).

Student Performance Measures for English 103/105

English Course Success: Figure 1 shows the success rates in English 103. Grades of A, B, C, or Credit are considered successful grades; D, F, and No Credit grades are not successful. A larger percentage of Project Success students (59.8%) successfully completed English 103 compared to 43.5% of non-Project Success students. The difference in success rates is statistically significant at the .01 level ($\chi^2=66.7$).

Project Success – English 103/105
Success in English 103
Aggregated Totals Fall 1996 through Spring 2000
(In Percent)

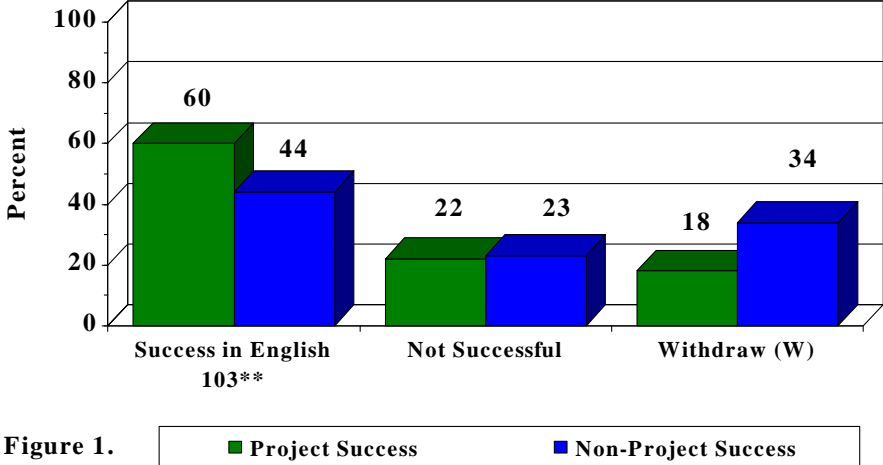


Figure 1. Project Success Non-Project Success

*p<.05 **p<.01

English Course Retention: A student is retained in a course if a valid grade other than a “W” (withdraw) is earned. As presented in Table 2, Project Success students (81.5%) were more likely to be retained in English 103 compared to non-Project Success students (66.5%). The difference in retention rates is statistically significant ($\chi^2=56.9$, p<.01).

Table 2
Retention Rate, Mean Semester GPA, Proportion of Units Completed,
and Semester-to-Semester Persistence

	Project Success (<u>n</u> =1,166)	Non-Project Success (<u>n</u> =795)	Statistical Significance
Retention rate	81.5%	66.5%	$\chi^2=56.9^{**}$
Mean semester GPA	2.24	1.99	$F=5.2^{**}$
Proportion of units completed	77.6%	66.2%	$F=64.5^{**}$
Persistence	70.4%	66.0%	$\chi^2=4.2^*$

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Semester GPA: Project Success students earned a higher mean semester GPA (2.24) compared to non-Project Success students (1.99). The difference between mean GPAs is statistically significant ($F=5.2$; $p < .01$).

Proportion of Units Completed: On average, Project Success students attempted and completed more units (11.8 and 10.2 units, respectively) than non-Project Success students (10.9 and 8.9 units, respectively). Project Success students also completed a significantly higher proportion of the units they attempted (77.6%) compared to non-Project Success (66.2%) students ($F=64.5$; $p < .01$).

Semester-to-Semester Persistence: Over seventy percent of students who enrolled in Project Success English 103 persisted to the subsequent semester. A significantly lower proportion of non-Project Success students (66.2%) persisted to the next term ($\chi^2=4.2$, $p < .05$).

Transition to the Next Level English: Figure 2 shows the proportion of students who transitioned to the next level English course (English 110). Over half of the Project Success students (53.8%) transitioned to English 110 compared to 42.3% of non-Project Success students. Although Project Success students were significantly more likely to transition to English 110 ($\chi^2=13.6$, $p < .01$), they were not more likely to earn a successful grade in that course.

**Project Success – English 103/105
Transition to and Success in English 110
Aggregated Totals Fall 1996 through Spring 2000
(In Percent)**

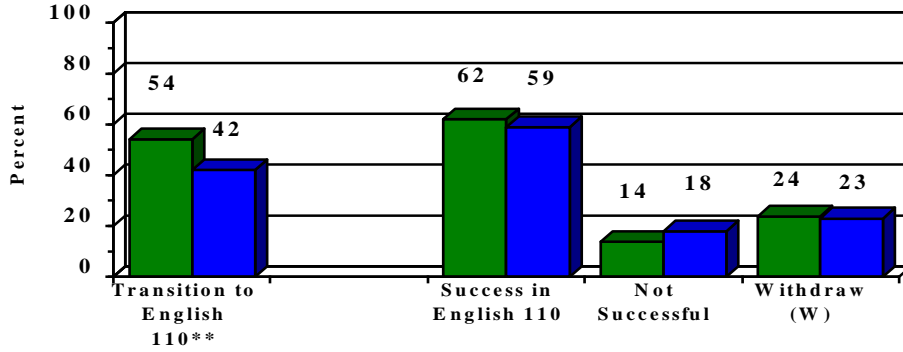


Figure 2. Project Success Non-Project Success

*p<.05 **p<.01

Student Performance Measures for English 110/106

English Course Success: Figure 3 shows the success rates in English 110. Over two-thirds of Project Success students (67.4%) successfully completed English 110. A significantly lower proportion of non-Project Success students (63.2%) successfully completed English 110 ($\chi^2=7.3, p<.05$).

**Project Success – English 110/106
Success in English 110
Aggregated Totals Fall 1996 through Spring 2000
(In Percent)**

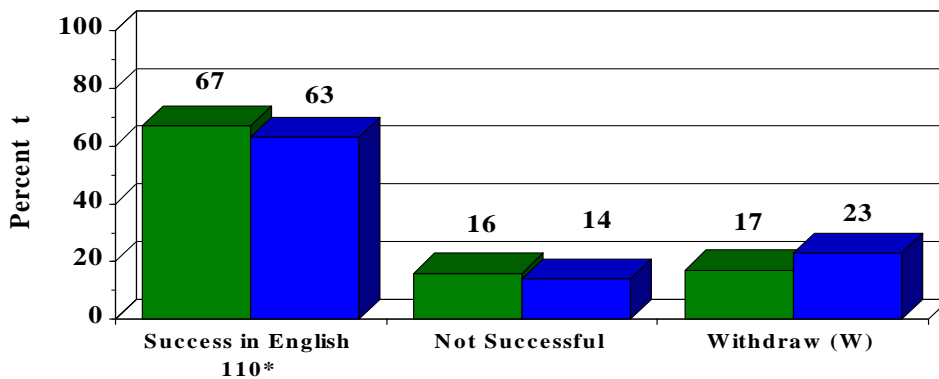


Figure 3. ■ Project Success ■ Non-Project Success

*p<.05 **p<.01

English Course Retention: Table 3 shows the retention rate for the two groups. Project Success students (82.9%) were significantly more likely to be retained in English 110 compared to non-Project Success students (77.1%; $\chi^2=7.2$, $p<.01$).

Table 3
Retention Rate, Mean Semester GPA, Proportion of Units Completed,
and Semester-to-Semester Persistence

	Project Success (<u>n</u> =917)	Non-Project Success (<u>n</u> =533)	Statistical Significance
Retention rate	82.9%	77.1%	$\chi^2=7.2^{**}$
Mean semester GPA	2.45	2.36	$F=.08$
Proportion of units completed	77.2%	74.3%	$F=.66$
Persistence	75.5%	64.7%	$\chi^2=19.1^{**}$

* $p<.05$ ** $p<.01$

Semester GPA: As shown in Table 3, Project Success students earned a slightly higher mean semester GPA (2.45) compared to non-Project Success students (2.36). The difference between mean semester GPAs is not statistically significant.

Proportion of Units Completed: Project Success students attempted and completed more units (11.8 and 9.9 units, respectively) than non-Project Success students (9.3 and 7.9 units, respectively). Project Success students completed a slightly higher proportion of the units they attempted (77.2%) compared to non-Project Success students (74.3%). The difference, however, was not statistically significant.

Semester-to-Semester Persistence: Over three-quarters of students (75.5%) who enrolled in Project Success English 110 persisted to the subsequent semester. A significantly lower proportion of non-Project Success students (64.7%) persisted to the next term ($\chi^2=19.1$, $p<.01$).

Transition to Next Level English: Figure 4 shows the proportion of students who transitioned to the next level English (English 120) course. About one-third of the Project Success students (33.5%) transitioned to English 120 compared to 19.9% of non-Project Success students ($\chi^2=30.6$, $p<.01$). Also, significantly more Project Success students (61.3%) were successful in English 120 than were non-Project Success students (47.5%; $\chi^2=6.9$, $p<.05$).

Project Success – English 110/106
Transition to and Success in English 120
Aggregated Totals Fall 1996 through Spring 2000
(In Percent)

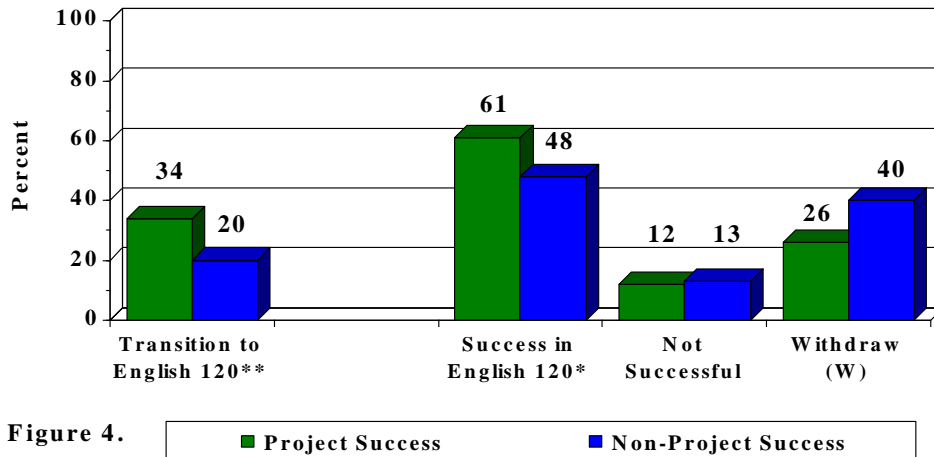
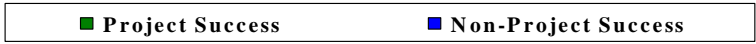


Figure 4.



* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Summary

As with the previous research study conducted by the Office of Research, Planning, and Academic Services, this study found that Project Success students, in general, were more successful than other students enrolled in the same English courses. To varying degrees, Project Success students in both English 103 and 110 had higher success, retention, persistence, and transition rates than their counterparts. They also had a higher mean semester GPA and completed a higher proportion of the units they attempted.

Caution must be used when drawing conclusions based on the results of this study. Factors such as limited availability of Project Success sections, the requirement of enrolling in both linked courses, and voluntary participation may result in differences among students who choose to participate in Project Success and those who choose to enroll in non-Project Success English courses. Therefore, as noted in the earlier study, “it is difficult to separate out differences attributable to program effects vs. differences attributable to student endogenous characteristics, such as motivation.” Further, while most of the differences in performance measures were statistically significant, common sense must be used in differentiating between “practical” and “statistical” significance.