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Initial Online Scholar-Mester Project, Pilot Report for Spring and Fall 2014



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Gratitude

I would like to give thanks to everyone who responded to my initial request to offer mini semesters (three week classes) during the sixteen week semesters. Out of the box thinking and action were called upon, and each of you responded quickly and positively. Whether the need was an intellectual exchange or a data request, the response was overwhelming. Thank you! Things were initially tabled, but things were carried forward with baby steps 😊

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Executive Summary

The Online Scholar-Mester Project (OSMP) has the data to support it as a successful start. Although obstacles occurred, they did not hinder the OSMP from reaching significant gains towards its innovative vision, mission, and goals. As with any groundbreaking design and implementation, different obstacles revealed themselves. These obstacles were seen as opportunities of insights instead of setbacks. As a result, they were viewed as building blocks and as intellectual tools to further expand the Online Scholar-Mester Project (OSMP) pilot, into the Online Scholar-Mester Program (OSM-P). A program that is successful and sustainable. Finally, with the obstacles in place, the overall success rate and completion rate for the OSMP still rose to demonstrate significant gains over the 16 week online classes, but keep in mind that the results of the OSMP is to be considered with caution due to the small number of participants in the pilot, compared to the great number in the target population.

HIGHLIGHTS

Online Scholar-Mester Project (Pilot) Results		
 SPRING 2014	SUCCESS RATE	COMPLETION RATE
Overall 3 weeks combined OSMP sections	63%	66%
Overall 16 weeks combined online sections	39%	47%

11-13-2014

A Peek into the Future of Developmental Learning

Aiming to address the state’s mandate to shorten the sequence of developmental learning, the OSMP was a welcomed means to an end. As a result, developmental math taught as an OSMP class gives way to promising results.

Introduction of the Problem

All community colleges in the United States face challenging retention rates, success rates, and graduation rates throughout their service in higher education. Likewise, Eastfield College (EFC) is no different. According to the EFC's 2012 Key Performance Indicator (KPI), EFC is doing well in some areas, but needs improvements in several others. The enclosed report will only address the areas of improvement that are relevant to the Online Scholar-Mester Project. These areas are: the fall to spring completion rate, the core completion success rate, and the developmental learning success rate. The 2012 KPI also indicates that Eastfield College performs below expectations for degrees awarded. This is relevant because it is a long-term goal of the Online Scholar-Mester Project. While both the short-term goals and long-term goal present themselves as somewhat of a challenge, make no mistake about it, the act of improving for Eastfield College is relentlessly pursued and embraced as a mission that is forever evolving.

One of the Many Relentless Pursuits to Improve Success

Eastfield College knows from experience that no one initiative can resolve all of the problems or challenges that a college face when serving a diverse population of students, faculty and staff. Therefore several initiatives have been launched to include the Online Scholar-Mester Project (OSMP).


The OSMP was founded by Dr. Tuesday S. Hambric in the spring of 2014. She started the project with the intentions of providing a successful learning platform, which takes into account the profiles of today's students. Her platform of

choice was online learning. Dr. Hambric set out to provide a successful, online platform that would improve student success via online learning all while maintaining the state's accountability measures. In support of such thinking, the OSMP was developed and defined as *best* practices, “research-based” approach to teaching and learning. More specifically, the Online Scholar-Mester Project is a rigorous and creative series of three or four week classes operating within a coordinated block schedule. Each course within the OSMP strives to maintain a rigorous, creative and condensed mode of instruction that delivers “research-based,” relevant course content, and practical applications of such content, all while successfully achieving and measuring Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs).

Vision, Mission, and Goals

The Online Scholar-Mester Project (OSMP) is not only grounded in research *best* practices, but it is also shaped by the targeted audience it serves and its founder's pioneering vision. As a result, it is guided by its mission and lofty goals. The audience for the OSMP is today's 21st century student; one who thrives off of instant gratification and one whose attention span is very short (Arum & Roksa, 2011). Armed with this profile and other research, Dr. Hambric created its vision, mission, and goals.

The vision of OSMP is to meet the online needs of the of the 21st century student while improving Excellence in Teaching and Learning. Its mission is to positively and significantly impact the online success rate; the developmental learning success rate and its completion series; and to maintain or increase the overall completion rate. The OSMP's immediate goal is to use the Online Scholar-

Mester brand  to offer an entire “Core Complete,” as well as fast-track developmental learning selections. It’s long-term and ongoing goal is to strive to offer an entire track of ADA compliant courses; and finally, its future goal is to follow our sister campus’ lead and be the second community college in the DFW area to offer an entire degree, all online, but the first to offer what Jamie Green call, “High Touch” (Personal communications, Fall 2014).

The Pilot

Shifting to the Online Scholar-Mester Project (OSMP) pilot itself. In the spring of 2014, Dr. Hambric conducted a semester long pilot. The purpose of the pilot was to see if the Online Scholar-Mester Project could reliably produce and validate the significant results she generated with her Learning Framework (LF) pre-pilot experiment. To give you some context, the results from her LF pre-pilot experiment was an increase in both the success rate and completion rates. The success rate increased from 54% to 64% and the completion rate increased from 81% to 92% (Office of Institutional Research, Statistical Data, personal communication, Fall 2014).

This time expanding the pre-pilot to a full pilot and eliciting faculty from the core, Dr. Hambric set up the following operational design for the OSMP pilot:

Hypothesis: The online, student success rate will significantly increase within the core classes, when students are given shorter classes and concentrated work (i.e. work that combine learning outcomes and commands demonstrated, quality output).

Operational Design: The operational design was simple—students took classes as a cohort, and they took them in the following order:


- EDUC/PSYC 1300 taught by Dr. Tuesday S. Hambric; ENGL 1301 taught by Dr. Shazia Ali; HIST 1301 taught by Matt Hinckley; and either MATH 1314 taught by Alla Kelman or MATH 2342 taught by Dr. Erika Glaser.
- The classes were linked and hardwired. Students were initially required to take all four classes.
- There were four mini-semesters created in a four week block schedule during the 2014 spring semester.
- The individual classes followed the May-mester format, each class being three weeks long.
- There was no collaboration of course content between the five Online Scholar-Mester faculties.
- Only full-time faculty was invited to participate.

Audience The population was fall and spring semester students—students who were accustomed to having 16 weeks to demonstrate their accumulated learning.

Results

The results of the OSMP pilot were inspiring. However, we must be careful and note that the pilot's sample size was very small compared to the overall online population; therefore, generalizations are to be cautiously made. With that said, data was requested to establish a base line for the online completion and success rates. This data collected was narrowed down to the same classes used in the OSMP. In other words, the 16 week online classes for EDUC/PSYC 1300, ENGL 1301, HIST 1301, MATH 1314, and MATH 2342 were compared to the 3 week OSMP classes. The results produced that the OSMP showed

significant gains in both the completion rate as well as the success rate. See the chart for further details.

 Online Scholar-Mester Project (Pilot) Results		
SPRING 2014	SUCCESS RATE	COMPLETION RATE
EDUC-PSYC 1300-43438 & 43439	89%	89%
OTHER EDUC/PSYC 1300 ONLINE (14)	63%	66%
ENGL 1301 - 43438	79%	79%
OTHER ENGL 1301 ONLINE (18)	45%	51%
HIST 1301-43438	89%	89%
OTHER HIST 1301 ONLINE (16)	59%	64%
MATH 1314-43438	9%	14%
OTHER MATH 1314 ONLINE (10)	21%	29%
MATH 2342-43438	22%	39%
OTHER MATH 2342 ONLINE (6)	48%	54%
Overall 3 weeks combined OSMP sections	63%	66%
Overall 16 weeks combined online sections	39%	47%

11-13-2014

Obstacles Encountered

The obstacles in this pilot were revealed both immediately and in a deferred fashion. The very first obstacle that showed itself immediately was the students' unwillingness to take the class as a cohort. There were more than 50 students to self-enroll in one of the OSMP classes, but then they dropped them within the first two weeks of registration.

Students enrolling and quickly dropping prove to be a brief mystery. For edification purposes, those students were contacted for feedback. The students stated that they wanted to take only one or more of the OSMP classes, not all four of them. The students interviewed

stated that they wanted flexibility when scheduling their classes. Some of the specific reasons stated for dropping classes were: Students had already taken one or more offered classes; or that students were not prepared to take all of the classes offered; or finally, that they did not qualify to take all the offered courses (e.g. math).

Clearly the students were in need of control. And because of this need for an a la carte menu, it initially caused low enrollment for the courses offered in the fourth semester of the mini-semesters. To resolve this problem, registration was unlinked, and the classes filled quickly.

In addition to the cohort vs. the a la carte limitations, it was discovered that students were not prepared for online classes from both the technological perspective as well as the required rigor. The technological problems were an easy fix. Because the EDUC/PSYC 1300 instructor, Dr. Tuesday Hambric, was the first class that the students had to take, technology proved to be a minor problem for the students and taken care of immediately. The key to this immediate fix was “high touch”. Since the online instructor was “high touch,” she was able to and willing to help the students via email, online, and face to face.

Another emerging hurdle was the thoroughness and accuracy needed for the students’ product output (i.e. assignments). Each instructor handled the students’ lack of college readiness in their own way. EDUC/PSYC 1300, ENGL 1301, and HIST 1301 managed to scaffold the majority of their students to significant product output. Of the four disciplines offered, the remaining two classes MATH 1314 and MATH 2342 showed to be the students’ biggest problem area.

The majority of the math students did not do well at all. As a matter of fact, they showed significant decreases in their performance vs. the significant increases that the other

disciplines showed (see the chart on page 8), but why? It was reported by the math instructors, Alla Kelman and Dr. Erika Glaser that several of their students were not a part of the original cohort. The impression that naturally followed was the idea that none cohort students were ill prepared for the rigor and accuracy that was expected from an OSMP student (personal communication, Spring 2014). Recall from the aforementioned problem with early enrollment. The low enrollment early on in the pilot, initiated the change from linked enrollment to a la carte enrollment. As a result, the profile of the students in the math classes were made up of late registration students, students taking a mixture of 16 week classes along with the three (3) week OSMP classes. That combination is more likely to produce less success; remember the beauty of the OSMP's design is so students can take one class at a time—giving them more time to intensely concentrate and to produce great product output. Supporting that sentiment, Mrs. Kelman reported that “the students in the cohort—six out of twenty—performed better than the students that were not a part of the cohort” (personal communication, Spring 2014). Dr. Glaser's findings did not have that same success. Dr. Glaser's class only had two students from the cohort and they were not successful (personal communications, Spring 2014). For the future math offerings, it is recommended that the classes be offered in the first and second mini-semesters until such time that the registration system can be hardwired to block students from mixing 16 week classes with the OSMP classes.

Lastly, the obstacles in this pilot were revealed, resolved and or discussed by the instructors as recommendations. And although problems occurred, some more significant than others, the overall success rate and completion rate for the OSMP still rose to demonstrate significant gains over the 16 week online classes. Again, keep in mind that the

results of this OSMP is to be considered with caution due to the small number of participants in the pilot compared to the very large number in the target student population.

Recommendations

In order for this project/pilot to move from the position of significant success to “The Model” online program in the DCCCD district and across the USA, several things need to take place. The next couple of paragraphs will address the recommendations from both the administrative and the teaching and learning perspectives.

Administrative

Advancing from Project Status to Program Status. There are a lot of implications that comes with a program verses a project. It is the recommendation of Dr. Hambric that EFC retain the status of project/pilot at least until the pilot has run its course collecting three years of data, as well as implementations of best practices. This recommendation for data collection is supported by the Office of Institutional Research (personal communication, Fall 2014). The rationale behind Dr. Hambric’s recommendation is that projects and pilots are usually not the target of SASCOC scrutiny. Even still, all OSMP instructors, the OSMP coordinator, and the eDean will work very hard to implement best practices and student success. With that, more of their time and resources can be allocated to the art of teaching online and producing outstanding results, than would be required to generate reports. Nevertheless, when reports are requested in house, the data shall be available to produce such reports.

Manpower and Capital. It is **STRONGLY** recommended that the OSMP be handed over to the eDean, Jamie Green for administrative support **and** that OSMP be assigned a Coordinator/Advisor. This recommendation is strongly grounded in the belief that with administrative support, the layout for the OSMP classes will be somewhat standard, therefore more familiar to the students and in essences promoting navigation and academic success. With a Coordinator/Advisor in place, students will be less likely to enroll in the course unaware of the demands and expectations that the OSMP places on its students, and because that would be one of his or her roles. The functions of the Coordinator/Advisor would be so that:

- He or she would, each semester, enroll students in the OSMP classes. Being sure to encourage the “one class at a time” design in an effort to promote student success. He or she would also advise the students about the instructors’ expectations, as well as, the expected rigor and commitment that is needed for students’ success in the OSMP classes.
- He or she would, each semester, create the Alpha, Omega, and Standard block schedules for course offerings.
- He or she would, each semester, coordinate with all coordinators and faculty to ensure all scheduling deadlines are met.
- He or she would, each semester, assemble the master course offering list and then communicate that list to the EFC Webmaster for webpage/online scheduling updates.

- He or she would, each semester, prepare and send out marketing material to EFC students via email, television monitors, kiosks, and social media.
- He or she would schedule OSMP specific training, to include ADA compliant training.
- He or she would create, every two years, statistical reports that give an analysis of the OSMP trends and recommendations for improvements.
- He or she would carry out all other duties pertaining to the success of the OSMP as assigned (*within reason*).

Teaching and Learning.

Students play a major role in their success and one of the things learned from this pilot is that they love choices. It is recommended that the course offerings remain a la carte. This will help empower students as well as help with enrollment.

Students' preparedness was an issue for the students and caused them some anxiety. It is recommended that the students be given a directive to take and pass an online training component, thus assisting them with online readiness and helping to regulate eLearning anxieties. Another recommendation is to provide professional development for OSMP faculty regarding "Best Practices" online layout training—best practices that are backed by research not just popularity.

It is recommended that math and science based classes be offered in the first and second blocks of the mini-semester blocked schedules. This is because the majority of the math students did not do well at all when they took the class in the fourth block of the blocked

schedule. The rationale is that the students' energy at that time is much lower than it is in the first and second semesters (personal communication, Kelman, Glaser, Rodriguez, Spring 2014).

As a final point, it is **STRONGLY** recommended that the students not be allowed to take any more than two classes at a time during any one, mini-block of instruction. And again, this can be monitored and overseen by the eAdvisor and eDean. The justification for this gleamed from the rules of the Winter-mester and the May-mester offerings. During both those semesters, due to the condensed timing and required rigor, students are not allowed to take more than two classes at a time to ensure their success. It is recommended that the same should be in place for the OSMP.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the OSMP was born from a calculated risk, grounded in research and driven by one faculty's purpose, vision, mission, and goals. It is hoped that Dr. Tuesday Hambric's efforts be further carried out and expounded into a viable and successful program, one that is desired and modeled by institutions of higher education throughout the DCCCD and the US. With the added expansion of "High Touch" and familiar layouts, the OSMP may possibly become the OSM-Program that pioneered and sculpted the highly sought after standards.

A Peek into the Future of Developmental Learning

In the opening paragraph, it is mentioned that the OSMP is attempting to help improve developmental learning. In the second semester of this pilot series (Fall 2014), developmental math was offered by Leticia Escobar. Mrs. Escobar offered the following

classes DMAT 0305, DMAT 0310, and DMAT 0090 as one linked class within the OSMP format. Reporting data from her eConnect grading page, Mrs. Escobar reports the following findings (personal communication, Fall, 2014):

- Total number of students: 24
- Total number of students retained: 21
- Total number of students successful (ABC): 14
- Total *Percentage Retained* (21/24) = 88%
- Total *Percentage Successful* “ABC’s” (14/24) = 58%

These findings are very promising considering there was no risk of declining student success or retention. The retention (88%) and success (58%) numbers were exactly the same in both the 16 weeks online classes, as it was for the 3 week OSMP classes. So, since the retention and success rates were at the very least maintained, then it appears to be a safe opportunity for students to use the OSMP courses to quickly move through the developmental math sequence. The results from the developmental pilot are encouraging, but the class is new and in the process of finding just the right formula for success. Thank you Leticia Escobar. In the spring of 2015, these classes will be repeated and a Developmental Integrated Reading and Writing (IRW) class will be offered as well.

To close, the abovementioned developmental math data is not confirmed by the EFC Office of Institutional Research, however, the data was retrieved from the official eConnect grading page; and as such, this information is very inspiring. This is inspiring because it gives rise to students possibly completing a series of developmental studies with a shorter period of time, in essence providing an answer to the state’s challenge of moving students through the

developmental learning sequence earlier. All in all, the entire study of both college level classes and developmental classes lends itself to being a plausible pursuit.

References

Arum, R. & Roksa, J. (2011). *Academically Adrift: Limited learning on College Campuses*. Chicago Press: Chicago, IL.

Dallas County Community College District (2012). *Key Performance Indicators: FY 2012*.