Instructional Practices Alignment Project Summary

ABE Transitions to Post-secondary Initiative: Alignment of ABE/Post-secondary Instructional Practices

The instructional practices alignment project was designed by ATLAS to assess the PD needs of ABE transitions-level instructors. The project had three goals:

1) Identify where ABE transitions instruction and curricula are aligning with MnSCU faculty expectations
2) Identify gaps between ABE transitions instruction and curricula and MnSCU faculty expectations
3) Identify PD needs and write guidelines for transitions teachers utilizing:
   a. Survey data review and interpretations
   b. Expertise of ABE and MnSCU faculty participating in working group to review survey
   c. Existing promising practices from ABE transitions teachers as identified in the survey

To facilitate this work with MnSCU and to build collaborative relationships valuable for other projects as part of the ABE Transitions to Post-secondary Initiative, the ATLAS Coordinator and Advisor met multiple times with Linda Lade, Director of College Transitions for MnSCU, and Lynda Milne, Director of the MnSCU Center for Teaching and Learning, for ideas, feedback on the survey, and assistance with reaching faculty to participate.

Below are details of the project and an outline of the process:

A) Develop surveys for ABE transitions instructors and MnSCU faculty (Developmental education, Health care, Trades/Technical Education).

To assist with the development of the survey, ATLAS hired a consultant with experience in adult education and curriculum alignment projects within MnSCU, Kelly Marchwick. ATLAS staff met with the consultant multiple times to develop appropriate surveys to identify current instructional practices and expectations of ABE transitions instructors and MnSCU faculty. With valuable technical assistance from Hamline, the survey was put online (utilizing SurveyMonkey) in March 2008.

The online survey went out to ABE instructors through direct mailing using existing mailing lists of known transitions instructors, and in appeals through the state office and ATLAS to program managers.

The online survey went out to faculty at multiple locations, but some MnSCU institutions were targeted specifically in order to ensure adequate representation from each region of the state and to those colleges with programs in developmental education, health care, and trades/technical education. Targeted institutions included:

- Northwest Technical College
- Minnesota State Community and Technical College
- Mesabi Range Community and Technical College
- St Cloud Technical College
- Hennepin Technical College
- Dakota County Technical College
- Saint Paul College
- Minnesota West Community and Technical College
- Riverland Community College

To reach MnSCU faculty, ATLAS relied on an email appeal from the MnSCU transitions liaison, Linda Lade, to administrators at the above institutions and through direct appeals from the ATLAS Coordinator to MnSCU colleagues.

B) Collect results and convene a working group to review survey results, identify trends, gaps, and promising practices.
ATLAS set a goal of 100 respondents for each survey. Over the 4-week period that the survey was available, 43 ABE teachers and 42 MnSCU teachers completed the survey. The working group was assembled and met at Hamline for a ½ day meeting on April 19. In attendance were:
- 3 ATLAS staff
- 5 MnSCU teachers (Hennepin Technical College, North Hennepin Community College)
- 4 ABE teachers (Cambridge, Hutchinson, Osseo, St Louis Park)
- 4 adult teacher educators (adjunct Hamline faculty and ATLAS consultants)

Together, working group participants reviewed and analyzed the ABE/ MnSCU survey data, identified main themes/issues, and formulated recommendations and action steps for bridging the gap between ABE and post-secondary education.

C) Share findings and draft guidelines for teachers. Use findings to inform design of needed PD for transitions-level instruction.
By the end of our fiscal year, June 30, 2008, preliminary findings of the survey were shared with ABE Regional Professional Development Coordinators and at regional events. Dissemination of the findings and guidelines for teachers continues through the upcoming year. In addition, the ATLAS Coordinator is currently working on completing a full report on the process and the findings for submission to a peer-reviewed journal.

Survey Demographics

Survey demographics	ABE	MnSCU
Number	43	42
Regions	44% Metro 56% Greater MN	59% Metro 41% Greater MN
Disciplines	• College Prep, including Mindquest Academy • GED • ESL • Content: Math, Literature, Science • Workforce: Pre-CNA, other • Keyboarding • Accuplacer Prep	• Developmental education: English, ESL, Study Skills, Math • Health care: RN, LPN, Radiologic Technician, Health Unit Coordinator, other • Trades/Technical Education: Construction Electricity, Business, Computer Science, other
Reported numbers of non-native speaking students	Less than ¼: 41.5% ¼ - ½: 22% ½ - ¾: 14.5% ¾ - all: 22%	Less than ¼: 41.5% ¼ - ½: 34.1% ½ - ¾: 9.8% ¾ - all: 14.6%
Reported numbers of under-prepared students		Less than ¼: 27.5% ¼ - ½: 37.5% ½ - ¾: 15% ¾ - all: 20%

Overarching themes identified

In general, ABE teachers feel that students are better prepared than MnSCU feel they are.

Theme	MnSCU	ABE Transitions
Independence and autonomous learning	Lots expected outside of class (reading, assignments, studying)	More teacher-directed, in-class work
Academic reading/writing	1. Reading for content 2. 30% of respondents require 31-50 pages of reading weekly 3. Expectations for note-taking and summarizing readings 4. 33% report assigning academic research papers 5. Use of short-answer assessment 6. Nearly 2/3 of assignments are 2-3 pages	1. Focus on learning to read 2. Just over 8% report assigning 31-50 pages of reading weekly 3. Limited practice with note-taking and summarizing readings 4. 4% report assigning academic research papers 5. Little practice with short-answer tests 6. Nearly 2/3 of assignments are 1 page or less
Academic listening	1. 44.7% report that the ability to synthesize information from lectures with other sources is extremely important 2. Nearly 60% report that taking notes effectively during lectures is very or extremely important 3. Nearly 80% report testing students on information from lectures	1. 82.6% report that the ability to synthesize information from lectures with other sources is sometimes or rarely addressed 2. 82.6% report that note-taking during lectures is sometimes or rarely addressed in class 3. Just over 36% report testing students on information from lectures
Technology	1. Online coursework; nearly 70% of respondents report using hybrid courses 2. Use of technology with assessments and projects (e.g. word processing, powerpoint) 3. Familiarity with library technology expected	Limited use of technology in the regular classroom (outside of use of MQA, for example). More than 70% of respondents report using only face-to-face classroom instruction
Intellectual honesty/plagiarism	Faculty do NOT feel that that students understand issues of intellectual honesty	Little actual instruction on how to do in-text citations, referencing, paraphrasing
Group/collaborative work	Emphasis on group projects	Limited use of group work
Instructional techniques	Expectation that students will adapt to variety of teaching styles and instructional techniques	

Marchwick, K., Johnson, K. A., & Parrish, B. (2008). *ATLAS Instructional Practices Alignment Survey*

Action Steps and Recommendations from the CWG

- **ABE/MnSCU Collaborations:**
  - Coordinate college field trips for ABE
  - Assemble college student panels for ABE (especially to highlight successful adult students who have made the transition)
  - Encourage ABE transitions grant applicants to write money into their proposals for field trips, MnSCU speakers, etc
  - Each MnSCU institution should host an ABE transitions course/program on-site to introduce ABE students to the college campus and to provide support for ABE students
  - Create list of contacts from local colleges to arrange for MnSCU guest speakers to visit ABE classes
  - Pair ABE and MnSCU teachers to learn more about each other and each other's context; perhaps have MnSCU faculty give a lesson example for ABE colleagues
- **Instructional techniques:**
  - ABE teachers should teach that failure is part of the learning process
  - Work with ABE teachers to train and encourage the use of more post-secondary teaching styles such as content lectures, group projects, etc.
  - Continue work with all teachers (ABE and MnSCU) on teaching to diverse learners and learning styles
- **Focus on reading:**
  - Find ways to encourage more reading in ABE and do more *academic* reading
  - Raise awareness among ABE teachers and students about the expectations for amount of reading at college
  - Create PD workshops on teaching organizing and note-taking when reading
- **Focus on listening:**
  - Create PD workshops for ABE teachers on teaching note-taking skills when listening (to lectures especially)
  - Integrate delivery of lectures into ABE with emphasis on taking notes, synthesizing information and being assessed on that information
- **Focus on writing:**
  - Encourage higher-order thinking skills (in writing and reading)
  - Increase the move from personal topics to more academic topics
  - Address issues of intellectual honesty and plagiarism through more focused attention on paraphrasing, using references and doing in-text citations
  - Work on summarizing, synthesizing and organizing information
- **Focus on technology:**
  - Encourage ABE instructors to work more on academic computer skills, including navigating websites, using educational technology such as Desire 2 Learn (used by MnSCU institutions), keyboarding and word processing
  - Get creative about finding funding for technology resources for ABE (especially for greater MN)
  - Investigate the possibility of MnSCU technical colleges donating technology/equipment to ABE sites when new is purchased