Did You Know?

This issue’s topic: Comparing Course Outcomes in Fast Track and Non-Fast Track Sections

Overview: Beginning in fall 2010, Chaffey College began experimenting with offering compressed format, or Fast Track, classes as one strategy for advancing the institution’s completion agenda. Fast Track classes meet for the same total number of hours as full-term classes but are a shorter duration (e.g., 8 weeks rather than 18 weeks). Nine Fast Track sections were piloted in fall 2010, followed by an additional 42 sections in spring 2011. Based on initially favorable research findings, the number of Fast Track section offerings has steadily grown; 93 of these sections were offered in fall 2012. Now that sufficient data have accumulated, the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) was able to compare course outcomes in Fast Track and non-Fast Track sections. This issue reports key findings in success rates for both groups by demographic characteristics.

Means of Assessment: Utilizing the college’s schedule of classes, the OIR identified all Fast Track sections offered in the 2011-12 academic year. This list was then merged with the college’s Chancellor’s Office Management Information System (COMIS) referential data files and a flag was created to indicate whether an enrollment was associated with a Fast Track or non-Fast Track section. Success Rates are defined as the percentage of students who received a passing/satisfactory grade (Numerator: A, B, C, CR, P; Denominator: A, B, C, CR, D, F, FW, I, P, NC, NP, W). Success rates were calculated for each group by demographic characteristics.

A measure of effect size, known as Cohen’s d, was used in this research to compare success rates in Fast Track and non-Fast Track sections by measured categories. While interpretations of this statistic vary, the most commonly accepted interpretation suggests that a d of .20 indicates a small effect, .50 a medium effect, and .80 or higher a large effect; d-values of .20 and higher are considered meaningful in this research.

Summary of Evidence: The mean course success rate across all Fast Track sections was higher than the overall mean course success rate in non-Fast Track sections in AY 2011-12 (see Fig. 1). This difference, however, was small, as evidenced by the d-value of .15.

Fig. 1 Success Rates in Fast Track and Non-Fast Track Sections, AY 2011-12
When success rates were examined by demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, ethnicity, age range, and DPS student status), three meaningful differences emerged. Specifically, males had higher success rates in Fast Track (80.1%) than in non-Fast Track (67.2%, $d = .29$) sections; bi-/multi-racial students had higher success rates in Fast Track (73.0%) than in non-Fast Track (63.2%, $d = .21$) sections; and, 30 to 34 year olds had higher success rates in Fast Track (83.1%) than in non-Fast Track (74.8%, $d = .21$) sections.

Taking analyses one step further, success rates in Fast Track and non-Fast Track sections were examined by gender and ethnicity. Bearing on discussions of the achievement gap, findings indicate that across all of the ethnic groups examined, males had higher success rates in Fast Track than in non-Fast Track sections (see Fig. 2). Furthermore, meaningful differences were observed for Asian males ($d = .23$), Caucasian males ($d = .31$), Hispanic males ($d = .32$), and Bi-/Multi-racial males ($d = .32$). The same pattern did not emerge for females, whose success rates were similar in Fast Track and non-Fast Track sections, regardless of ethnicity.

Fig. 2 Males’ Success Rates in Fast Track and Non-Fast Track Sections by Ethnicity, AY 2011-12

If you have any questions or comments about this *Did You Know?*, please contact Carli Straight at carli.straight@chaffey.edu or (909) 652-6471.