Transitioning Learners to Calculus in Community Colleges

Institutional Self-Assessment Tool

Transitioning Learners to Calculus in Community Colleges (TLC3) is a research project aimed at transforming the way colleges identify and remove barriers for underrepresented racially minoritized student (URM) transitioning into and through mathematics courses required for degrees in STEM (Science, Engineering, Technology and Mathematics). Here we present a validated set of practice that may positively influence URM student success in the STEM mathematics pathway. Colleges committed to improving racial equality in mathematics attainment can self-assess the degree to which they have implemented these practices and identify next steps to enhance their efforts to support URM students in the STEM math pathway.

1. Mathematics Placement

Multiple measures used for placement, including high school transcripts
Advising about the placement process and results is given to students
Policies and practices ensure highest possible placement (e.g., retesting, test-prep resources, adjusting after term begins)

2. STEM Math Pathway Courses

The course sequence and required course materials in the STEM math pathway are optimized for timely progress
Courses are designed to transfer to baccalaureate institutions
Data on student outcomes in STEM math pathway courses, disaggregated by race/ethnicity within gender, are reviewed at least annually by mathematics faculty

3. Instruction

Relational Instruction Practices
Authentic care and welcomeness to engage are expressed to students
Student questions and concerns are validated and addressed in a timely fashion
What students find helpful or hindering in their college and math courses is well-known and understood by mathematics faculty
Performance monitoring techniques are used consistently (e.g., feedback on learning, reminders about deadlines, etc.)

Mathematical Instruction Practices
Student active involvement in problem solving is central to mathematics instruction
Students are invited to discuss or share their thinking about mathematics with each other
The relevance of mathematics (to careers, personal lives, etc.) is made explicit to students during class or in class materials
The mathematical content and tasks are challenging in terms of cognitive demand

4. Student Support

Current grade standing is available to students throughout the term
Dedicated space is available on campus for students to gather and work together on mathematics
Math tutoring and instructor office hours are available and easily accessible to students
Relevant support services are highlighted in syllabi and during instruction (e.g., tutoring, disability services, transfer advising, wellness center)

5. Institutional Responsibility

Permanent base funding is provided by the college to bolster and support the success of URM students in the STEM math pathway
High-quality and ongoing professional learning focused on inclusive teaching strategies, implicit bias, and racial microaggressions is provided to full- and part-time mathematics faculty
Targeted efforts are undertaken by the college to provide resources for students facing food, health, and housing insecurities (e.g., food pantry, free walk-in clinic, emergency financial assistance)

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In two-year colleges, students transition into the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) math pathway through a college’s mathematics placement process. Required coursework can range from developmental mathematics up to or through precalculus, calculus I and calculus II. The practices presented here were developed based on mixed-methods research comprising a National Survey of Community College Mathematics Chairs (https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED592079), case studies of mathematics programs in four Minority-Serving Institutions: a Predominantly Black Institution, a Hispanic Serving Institution, an Asian American, Native American and Pacific Islander Serving Institution, and a Tribal College, and content validation by the TLC3 advisory board.

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