

## Overview of St. Benilde's Efforts in College Entry Issues

### DLSU-COLLEGE OF ST. BENILDE School of Deaf Education and Applied Studies

#### A REPORT ON SDEAS' CURRENT PRACTICES AND CONCERNS REGARDING COLLEGE ENTRY ISSUES

##### A. Historical Background

Year Started: 1990

Nature of Program: Certificate Course in Bookkeeping and Accounting

Purpose: Provide vocational course for Deaf HS graduates that will equip them with necessary skills for immediate employment

Faculty Core: extensive experience in teaching tertiary education but no experience in Deaf education nor background in Deaf students needs, concerns, effective tools for Deaf education, etc

Deaf profile: competency in reading, writing, and math were very, very poor. Basic course for college (elementary math, college algebra, reading skills 1, communication skills 1&2 offered on the first year) could not be completed. Self-esteem (as previously discussed) very low and interplays with poor academic performance. Many learned responses indicate helplessness – too afraid to think, to try, and creates countless excuses to justify behaviors and attitudes detrimental to learning.

Root problems: natural ability to think and comprehend suppressed in elementary and high school due to limited or absence of opportunities to develop 1<sup>st</sup> language (FSL) and subjected to the 2<sup>nd</sup> language (English). Rote memory encouraged, no opportunity for analytical thinking to develop via communication, classroom processes, etc. CSB faculty was also ill prepared to respond to Deaf needs (did not have FSL competence, even in signing exact English, nor did not have the orientation and skills to handle such students with glaring learning needs).

Response: Regular 3 hour/wk classes per subject were extended to 6 hours/wk in the hope that providing more time would help students catch up. But most teachers remain to have poor SL skills, more so uses English framework in signs.

More teachers were hired from the elementary and HS for the Deaf since they had the academic training and experiences in Deaf education. However, this became detrimental to the program and students' performance. Students' perceived that the classroom academic requirements were lowered; and traditional teaching strategies reflected similarities with students' elementary or high school experiences were among some of the complaints of the students.

Created a degree program (Bachelor in Applied Deaf Studies) to train Deaf students to become teachers for the Deaf. It was hoped that in the long run, they would help improve Deaf education and consequently help in the cognitive and psycho-emotional development of Deaf children. However, students' readiness (basic competencies, interests and aptitude for higher courses and more so, for teaching) were in question.

## B. Strategies Used to Assess Applicants' Readiness for College

1. Entrance Test – student applicants were given entrance tests but results do not serve as basis for decision. Though norms for Deaf applicants through the years were developed, percentile rank of applicants was used in combination with other key areas determined through interview, recommendation letters, and HS grades. Validity and reliability were in question due to language issues.

1990 – 1996 – no data record of entrance examinations. Applicants were few and mostly numbered to 15 a year. Scholarships were also given to all those who applied. All students were enrolled in the degree program.

1996 – 2000 – entrance exam used called CSBET. This is an entrance examination instrument that was developed for CSB Hearing applicants. An essay was also written. Interpreters were provided to interpret instructions.

2000- to present – Differential Aptitude Test and TONI-3 were used. TONI-3 was recommended since it is a language free measure of abstract/figural problem solving skills. Essay was also included. Interpreters were provided to interpret instructions.

At present, study will be made to determine whether the entrance examination results can predict students' academic performance.

2. Interviews –

1996-2000 – students were interviewed to assess their competency in the following: compute 1 to 2 digit numbers (addition, subtraction, multiplication) and sign language communication. Hypothetical situations were also presented to the students to determine their general thinking processes and strategies to resolve the hypothetical situations.

2000 to present – focus of interview is on the students' communication skills (watching skills, signing skills, reading skills, thinking skills). Students were asked to answer questions that were written and signed. Nature of responses gave indication to their FSL and English competence as well as their thinking skills. They were also asked to write an essay based on a written question.

In both instances, a rating scale was developed to quantify evaluator's observations. Rating in each area including recommendations from HS academic adviser and principal, and their cumulative HS GPA, were also computed to determine over-all performance. The result is used to help evaluators decide whether the student should be enrolled in the degree program or the certificate course.

However, beginning 2000, this process was no longer used as basis for entry to an academic program. Performance of students in both degree and certificate courses vary extensively. A few of those initially perceived to be competent for the degree program (based from the ratings made) are recognized to be "out-of-touch" from classroom discussions, written academic requirements, etc as indicated by their inability to respond coherently, either in signs or written form. A few of those were initially identified to be on probation (because of attitude problems, low HS GPA, etc that were assessed using the rating scale) are now excelling in particular subject areas, and a few in the specialization areas.

Beginning 2000, the interviews focused on identifying students who have shown indicators of having certain levels of thinking skills as they read and respond to SL communication and the written English language. Their SL responses are evaluated to determine whether these are mere rote response or have indication of thinking creatively, inferentially, etc. All students who were accepted were placed in the pre-college program.

Over-all, almost all students who applied were accepted. A few who were denied acceptance were those were "strongly not recommended or recommended with reservations" by their school. These students often involve disciplinary cases, fraternities or the likes.

Actual number of students who finally enroll are further reduced due to the fact that they are not given a subsidy grant, or the grant given to them is still not enough for them to pay for the tuition fees.

### C. Strategies Used to Assess First Year Students' Readiness for Degree Program

Since students' performance vary and the entrance results appear to be unreliable to predict students' academic performance, all students were accepted into the pre-college program which is focused on building language and math competency and developing self-esteem.

The pre-college program is actually the existing program of the previous years that were included as part of the core subjects/activities of a student's first year in college. This included subjects for English competency, subjects for Math competency and intensive co-curricular activities that includes the following:

- CRU-DEAF activities (regular individual counseling, group counseling, guidance workshops/lectures and parent-child counseling for special cases)
- Spiritual development activities (regular Catholic mass celebrations, retreats, recollections)
- Sports and Dance activities (included in their PE subjects and other special activities in need of Deaf presentation)
- Deaf-Hearing interaction (done through our Sign Language Learning Program)

Aside from venues where students attend and participate (e.g. workshops, symposiums, retreats, etc), many of the activities mentioned provide opportunities for students to actually take part in the preparation and implementation of special activities. These are opportunities to build successful experiences that will validate students' competence and worth.

The Pre-college concept was officially recognized as basis for assessment of students' readiness for higher learning. Students were told that their academic and non-academic performance in this level and the succeeding level (Certificate course) would serve as basis to decide on their readiness to enter the degree program.

Another difference is the core track of the language area. In the previous years since 1996, the 1<sup>st</sup> year language courses focused on building the English Language competency of the students. However, it was observed that those who eventually excelled in reading writing the English language were those who were late deafened and hard of hearing individuals who to begin with had minimum competencies in the English language even before they enrolled in CSB. They had all the opportunities to learn the oral language before they became Deaf or had enough hearing capability to actually pick-up the skill in their interaction with family, teachers and classmates in hearing school.

The pure Deaf remained to suffer in confusion and low self-esteem due to their poor reading and writing competencies, just some of the many factors affecting them. More so, sign language communication often involved rote memory

responses, limited or absence of inferential thinking and great difficulty to actually embark on in-depth analysis and creative thinking. Analysis of their sign language responses also indicates their limitation to actually think using their FSL competency. Content analysis of their SL responses in the English classes contained a lot of artificial signs that were probably ingrained in their thinking system as a result of an educational system that advocated the use of such artificial language (signing Exact English).

It is for this reason that the language core track of the pre-college program is focused on building and enhancing students awareness and competency to think and use FSL as their primary language. Self-expression, identification, analysis and in-depth discourse takes place to draw out their perceptions, questions and insights on what is real FSL and what is artificial sign language. Building that sense of recognition, and eventually thinking using that language, builds not only their capability to infer and do creative thinking. It also builds their self-esteem. On their 2<sup>nd</sup> year, students begin to re-orient themselves with the English language as a foreign language to be learned in the context of their primary language.

Building Math Competency is not as extensive as the one involved in Language. The courses involved here are Elementary Math, Introduction to Algebra, and College Algebra. There used to be only 2 math courses. However, students' performance in the college algebra course is very poor indicating that the elementary math courses are not enough to prepare them for Algebra. Introduction to Algebra was created to facilitate students' readiness

#### D. Comments About the Strategies (item B and C)

One area of limitation is that we have not identified the specific sub skills for each core skills (language competency, mathematical competency, self-esteem) that students must develop across all subject areas (Academic and non-academic). There are no specific indicators that will serve as our guideposts for the core skills and their sub skills that we are trying to build. And there are many sub-skills that may also be considered as a core skill. Example, thinking skills is an area that can be developed across all the subject areas. This skill has other sub skills that need to be identified and addressed across all courses, across all strategies.

Since there is that absence of indicators, recommendation for students' readiness after 1 or 2 years will be purely subjective. We may be able to develop an assessment tool (A rating scale again perhaps) that will help us quantify these observations. However, the issue to address is whether the skills being assessed were really addressed and developed in the subject areas. There is a danger that we might be looking for something we have not really identified and seriously addressed via classroom strategies.

#### D. Strategies Used to Determine the Compensatory or Remedial Skills Needed for Program Entry

Assessment made is based on students' performance in a subject. But there are no specific competency skills identified that serve as a guide for the teacher making the assessment whether the student concerned need intervention or remedial programs to develop skills for the said subject or higher courses.

Teachers report problems encountered that indicate students' difficulties. However, there are no program interventions available to assist these students. Maybe if certain information and strategies are clear and there are programs to benchmark on we would be able to develop strategies to assess their skills as well as intervention or remedial programs to address them.

E. Strategies to Determine Students' Personal and Social Needs and Determining How to Address Them

Various strategies are employed, however, these are based on the discretion of the teacher. Attempts have been made to draw out specific core skills and values that students must develop across all courses. But the absence of an existing program to benchmark and the general know how is quite limited, the effort to unify these to achieve common goals proved to be difficult.

So based on teachers' observations only. Once deemed crucial to student's development, the teacher makes referrals to the counselor concerned. Either verbal or written, the faculty seeks out the help of the counselor. The counselor then takes over.

A significant strategy I often employ to assess students' needs in general, and determine the strategies needed to address their needs, is calling for consultation meetings with students. This serve as a session for generating feedback about programs, gather data on expressed needs and recommendations on how to address those needs. I started reminding the faculty to employ similar strategies of soliciting feedback and gathering important data on Deaf profile and strategies that are deemed important and helpful by the students. However, this becomes the discretion of the teacher again. There is no existing system that ensures teachers are actually consulting students.

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