MEMORANDUM

To: Chief Academic Officers, Public Senior Universities

From: Marshall A. Hill

Date: March 31, 2000

Subject: Funding for “Learning Framework” courses

In October 1999, the Coordinating Board authorized formula funding (of up to three semester credit hours per student) for what were described as “Learning Framework” courses designed “to improve students’ understanding of the learning process and their ability to succeed in college.” This action implemented a recommendation from the Council of Chief Academic Officers. Prior to October, all courses which focused primarily on the improvement of the student’s individual learning skills were classified as “developmental” and were, therefore, not eligible for formula funding. Still unfunded are non-collegiate courses which focus on study skills apart from the framework of learning, cognition, and motivation theory. Similarly, courses such as freshmen/university seminar courses that serve primarily an “orientation” function (and sometimes teach study skills) will remain unfunded.

In order to give universities more guidance on this policy, below you will find 1) a description of the type of courses that the Board intended to fund, 2) the means to receive more information about developing similar courses, and 3) the process necessary for securing formula funding for them.

Course Description:

Courses fundable under this policy could employ titles such as “Theories and Applications of Learning” or “Learning Framework.” It is the content of the course, however, that will determine whether the course will be funded. We have the following expectations:

The prototypical “fundable” course is an applied learning, cognition, and motivation course, which draws on theory from the fields of psychology and education. We would expect the course to focus on 1) research and theory in the psychology of learning, cognition, and motivation, 2) factors that impact learning, and 3) application of learning strategies.

The critical characteristic of the course is the presence of theoretical models as the curricular core. Instructors teaching the particular courses described to the Board said that they introduce models of strategic learning, cognition, and motivation and then use these theories as the conceptual basis for presenting college-level student academic strategies. Instructors of these courses will often use different assessment instruments (e.g., learning inventories) to help students identify their own strengths and weaknesses as strategic learners. Students are
ultimately expected to transfer and apply the learning skills discussed across their own academic programs and become effective and efficient learners. Students developing these skills should be able to continually draw from the theoretical models they have learned.

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While traditional study skills courses include some of the same learning strategies (e.g., notetaking, reading, test preparation etc.) as the prototypical learning framework course, the focus of study skills courses is solely or primarily on skill acquisition. Study skills courses which are not undergirded by scholarly models of the learning process are not considered college-level, and, therefore, are not eligible for formula funding.

More information

Two institutions, Southwest Texas State University and The University of Texas at Austin, have for several years offered learning framework courses and have data that support their effectiveness. Should you have further questions, you may contact:

Dr. Russ Hodges                  or  Dr. Claire Ellen Weinstein
Southwest Texas State University   The University of Texas at Austin
512-245-7922      512-471-1375
rh12@swt.edu      ce.weinstein@mail.utexas.edu

Course Approval

The decision to offer such a course at your institution is, of course, yours. If you do develop and offer such a course, however, the Board has provided that you may have a fundable course of up to three semester credit hours on your inventory that fits this description. (Our assumption is that you would need only one “learning framework” course on your inventory; let us know if you have different plans.)

To receive funding for such a course, you should assign the course a CIP code of 42.0301.00 (Cognitive Psychology) while performing the annual update of your institution’s course inventory. If Coordinating Board staff have questions about a course designated for funding in this fashion, we may ask for a copy of the course syllabus. If you have questions about whether a particular course should be funded, contact Dr. Kal Kallison (kallisonjs@thecb.state.tx.us or 512-483-6222).