

The HB5 College Preparatory Courses in English and Math Designed for Rio Grande Valley Students

Answers to Your Frequently Asked Questions

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The HB5 college prep courses in English and math were prepared in response to legislative requirements and instituted beginning Fall 2014. In the Rio Grande Valley, all local institutions of higher education worked closely with many local ISDs, RGV Focus, Educate Texas, and Region One ESC to develop a shared approach as formalized in a joint MOU so that all students from the region could be seamlessly supported regardless of high school or institution of higher education choice. Given the complexity of the cooperation involved, we have prepared these responses to frequently raised questions to assist our educational partners in implementing these courses.

- 1. *Who should take these college prep course(s)?*** These courses are for “bubble” students who want to go to college and have passed their End of Course (EOC) exams in reading, writing, and/or math, but are not yet college ready in one or more of those areas.
- 2. *We already offer an ACT/SAT/TSI prep course on our high school campus. Can't we just use that current course in place of the college prep course?*** No. College prep courses have been designed to meet a specific set of learning outcomes, some of which might overlap with a test prep course, but many of which will not, particularly for reading and writing. In addition, the final assessment for the reading/writing course is a portfolio of student work written (and revised) throughout the entirety of the course. There is no way to complete the portfolio without doing the work prescribed in the curriculum developed by the IHEs.
- 3. *Where does the curriculum for the college prep courses come from?*** School districts should assign instructors with a successful record in Algebra 1 and Algebra 2 instruction to the *math college prep course*. The curriculum follows the TEKS objectives for Algebra 1 and part of Algebra 2 relatively closely, and instructors should be able to make use of existing lesson plans and techniques. The emphasis of the course must be on student work and practice with the material with the assumption that they have already seen much of it, but are working towards mastery. UTPA is providing a free online homework system, WebWork, or a school can opt to use the commercial software MyMathLab. Instructors should use one of these tools for in class activity or as a homework system. Instructors should attend training with UTPA faculty to learn more about the software and the course design. English faculty from the partnering IHEs have developed the curriculum for the *reading/writing college prep course*; it includes a wealth of resources for teachers, including a free textbook with suggested readings, writing assignments, and rubrics. This material is available online via iTunes, iBooks, Google Drive, and a private blog. Contact Dr. Colin Charlton (ccharlton@utpa.edu) for more info.
- 4. *What do the final assessments look like? Who grades them?*** For *math*, students will be given a common final exam. If the instructor utilizes the online homework system, Webwork, provided by UTPA free of charge, and can provide students with a computer lab or tablets for the final exam, and then the final exam can be administered in this system. Initial grading of the final exam will then be by the

computer; instructors will have the option to assign partial credit based on written work collected or based on answers submitted but marked wrong (missing minus signs). For *reading/writing*, students will turn in a portfolio of their work, which will contain four writing assignments that students have been working on throughout the year as part of the required curriculum. High school teachers will assess the portfolios using the rubric provided by the partnering IHEs. Teachers will be required to attend a calibration session with other course instructors, led by IHE faculty, to ensure consistency in scoring.

- 5. *We hear from our teachers that the college prep course in English utilizes a "studio model" and the math course utilizes an "emporium" or "active learning" model. What are those, and how can I support my teachers in utilizing these approaches?*** When you walk into a "studio" reading/writing classroom, you will see students actively working on their reading and writing assignments, giving and receiving feedback on their writing, revising their work, and conferencing one on one with their teacher on a daily basis. In math, we are asking that teachers follow an emporium or active learning model. The biggest hurdle is the availability of computers or tablets for use in class; the more these resources are available, the more practice and instantaneous feedback the students can receive.
- 6. *How long will a student who successfully completes the college prep course (i.e. received a grade of 70 or higher both for the course AND the final assessment) be considered "college ready" in the respective area(s) at the partnering Institutions of Higher Education?*** Students will be considered college ready *at the partnering institutions* for a period of one year. However, please remember that students can always (re)take the TSI Assessment at any time, and, if they score high enough, they will be deemed college ready at that time.
- 7. *What happens if a student retests and becomes college ready in the middle of the course?*** First of all, that's great! If doing so will not hurt the student in any way, s/he could drop the course. However, both the math and the reading/writing courses are designed to provide rigorous preparation for college in these areas. Completing the course may give the student an edge in many of the first credit-bearing courses the student takes in college. For math, the recommendation is that the instructor adjust the assignments and work for that student individually to follow a more advanced set of topics, touching on things that will be new or less familiar to the student like the more advanced objectives from Algebra 2. The WebWork homework system has appropriate problems available for instructors to use in this case.
- 8. *Will successful completion of the college prep course and final assessment guarantee admission into the partnering institutions of higher education?*** No, institutions of higher education will determine admission to their respective institutions.

For additional information on the HB5 course implementation in the Rio Grande Valley, contact:

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