



# Mindquest Matters

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A Mindquest Academy Newsletter

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## Teachers Pilot Online Training Modules

Thirty-four new teachers are currently piloting Mindquest Academy's recently developed online teacher training program. Consisting of six modules, the program revolves around a number of major themes: academic literacy and postsecondary expectations, curriculum design, individualizing a student's learning program making the online experience successful for students, integrating teaching approaches that build cognitive skills and knowledge, and getting comfortable with the college culture.

The teacher training program this year includes participating in three face-to-face sessions and working remotely with the online modules. Teachers email their "assignments" and the Mindquest team responds with suggestions and comments. This "hybrid" delivery model will be used in the future, along with any adaptations the team believes important. The team consists of Bella Hanson, Greta Ploetz and five teacher trainers: Paula Freiermuth, Rita Koon, Sue Ann Rawlins, Tammy Twiggs, and Karen Wolters.

The aim is to expand opportunities for ABE teachers across the state to participate in the training program and receive a certificate from state ABE as a

qualified online teacher. Titles of the six modules are:

- Mindquest academy and postsecondary transitions
- The teacher, the students, and the courses: Making it all work!
- Creating the online learning environment
- A pedagogy for practitioners
- Spiraling, scaffolding, and other schemes
- Moving ahead to college

## Teacher Self-assessment Reveals High Interest in Online Learning

In a self-assessment survey from the first online training module, teachers answered questions about their online learning and teacher experience:

Four have taken college courses online and five have taken online postgraduate courses.

A significant number are using web-enhanced curriculum materials with their learners.

Almost everyone feels comfortable using technology, some more than others. A variety of reasons were given to the question about why they are interested in Mindquest:

--Offer GED and ESL students a higher level of academic preparation for post

- secondary education
- Use courses that have a strong focus on college success
- Increase the options available for my students
- Use the Internet for teaching
- Offer students the abundance of knowledge and information in the courses
- Be involved in distance learning
- Provide an option for students to gain skills at their convenience
- Desire to be more proficient in instruction

### Reflections from Teachers

In an activity in Module 3 teachers were asked to respond to this question, "Do you think Mindquest Academy courses communicate high expectations? If so, how?" Bob Maas, a College Prep instructor with Mankato ABE and South Central College writes:

"Mindquest Academy courses are different from any other online courses I have worked with. They always have the students use what they have learned. They are given examples and then they explore and try out a concept with their teacher's help. But, the bottom line is that they know they will have to demonstrate proficiency and understanding of the concept by the end of the module or the course. It's not a "read the chapter and answer the questions" type of curriculum. It's not a "look at the questions and go find the answers without ever reading the material" type of curriculum. It's a curriculum that shows them all the pieces and takes them far

beyond the literal understanding of a concept...It is a very comprehensive approach."

Also in Module 3 was a question: Have you found any example of reflective learning in Mindquest Academy courses: Julie Mischke from the Hutchinson ABE program has this response:

"I think the best reflective learning is in the continuous conversation of a task: teacher helps, the redo, teacher acknowledgement of improvement. All this stays together for the student to use as they learn and refine. Mindquest is a wonderful portfolio...saving so many trees. One fine folder of assignments can be saved easily and a student can view his process of learning. This hopefully will prepare them for the college experience, too."

### Continuing Education Seminar

Teachers from the 2005 - 2007 pilot trainings are meeting together a second time this year on March 28 at Eisenhower Community Center in Hopkins.

Karen Wolters from Mankato ABE and Terry Jaakkala from Osseo ABE - Mindquest Academy College Prep teachers - will share their experiences in creating a hybrid learning environment within community/technical colleges.

Other topics of discussion will include the 3-year Transitions Initiative activities, marketing college prep within ABE, what makes teaching and learning with

Mindquest Academy successful in ABE programs, and the GED scenarios.

### **Questions about College Admissions or the Accuplacer?**

Barry Shaffer has sent out information about the MnSCU-ABE regional workshops to be held in six colleges in April, May and June. The workshops will feature admissions and financial aid, advising, degree and program overview, and developmental education, and placement testing with Accuplacer. Register online on the ATLAS website. [www.hamline.edu/atlas](http://www.hamline.edu/atlas)

### **Approaches to Transitioning Adults To Postsecondary Education**

Judith Alamprese notes three approaches that ABE programs are using in developing activities to transition learners to postsecondary education in her article about transition to post-secondary education. (Her article is on the NCSALL website [www.ncsall.net](http://www.ncsall.net).)

Awareness and orientation activities include information about college admissions and registration processes, financial aid, and college placement examinations. They may arrange meetings for the students with admissions and financial aid staff; or they may integrate information about college requirements, forms completion, and financial aid into ABE classes.

Counseling and referral activities may be integrated into usual ABE services or the program may have an established rela-

ationship with a college and refer students to counseling and tutoring.

In the comprehensive program model, ABE programs provide a multi-component set of services that operate over a few weeks. Academic preparation is the critical component in these programs. The goal often is to assist learners in being admitted into postsecondary classes.

### **What is College Readiness?**

A paper that the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation commissioned Dr. David T. Conley to write (March, 2007), "Toward a More Comprehensive Conception of College Readiness," is an excellent read.

The authors provide an operational definition of college readiness that is different from current representations of the concept.

In the Introduction they state: "Recent research has shed light on several key elements of college success. Most important for this paper is the realization that a range of cognitive and meta-cognitive capabilities, often described as "key cognitive strategies," have been consistently and emphatically identified by those who teach entry-level college courses as being as important or more important than any specific content knowledge taught in high school. Examples of key cognitive strategies include analysis, interpretation, precision and accuracy, problem solving, and reasoning. Close behind in importance is knowledge of specific types of content knowledge.

Several studies have led to college readiness standards that specify key content knowledge associated with college success. Writing may be by far the single academic skill most closely associated with college success, but the “big ideas” of each content area are also very important building blocks.

Similarly important are the attitudes and behavioral attributes that students who succeed in college must demonstrate. Among these are study skills, time management, awareness of one’s performance, persistence, and the ability to utilize study groups. These are both specific skills and more general attitudes, but all of them require high degrees of self-awareness and intentionality on the part of students as they enter college.

Finally, an increasing number of studies have highlighted the importance of the contextual knowledge that a student must possess to be ready for college. These studies describe the need for students to understand how to apply to college, how to manage financial aid issues, and, perhaps most importantly, how to adjust to college once they arrive. The transition to college has a component of culture shock for students, one that is more severe for students from some communities than others. Information about the culture of college helps students understand how to interact with professors and peers in college and how to navigate college as a social system and learning environment...

...While the precise number of students requiring remediation is difficult to ascertain, federal statistics indicate that 40% of admitted and enrolled students take at least one remedial course (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004), reducing dramatically their probability of graduating and costing up to an estimated \$1 billion per year (ACT, 2005b). The California State University system, which draws its students from the top third of high school graduates in the state and which tracks remediation rates more precisely, finds that 46% of all first-year students require remedial education in both English and mathematics (Ali & Jenkins, 2002). The rates at community colleges are likely much higher, leading to multi-tier remediation programs at some institutions where student skill levels are so low they must take more than one remedial course in a subject area before reaching a credit-bearing course.

Having to enroll in remedial courses increases the time it takes students to complete their degrees and is associated with a decrease in the likelihood they will graduate (Adelman, 1999; National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). “(pp 5-10)

The paper focuses on college enrollees coming from high schools; however, the concept of college readiness and the ways suggested to foster college readiness fit the ABE population as well.

The paper can be downloaded from <http://www.s4s.org>.