

### *Summary of Pass the Torch Evaluation*

*Pass the Torch* was established at Foothill College to support the academic success and retention of community college students considered at-risk,<sup>1</sup> particularly African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students. Jean Thomas, a professor and student counselor at this College, founded the project in 1996, and since then the project has served more than 1,000 students. The key function of the project has been to form study teams by pairing at-risk student enrolled in core courses (known as team members) with academically successful students (team leaders) and provide both with the necessary support to accomplish the project's main objectives: retention and academic success of the team member.

Since its beginnings, *Pass the Torch* has been perceived as a very successful project. However, previous evaluation efforts and data analyses suggesting the success of the project have been quite limited and have not addressed other factors, such as previous academic achievement and motivation of the members, which could explain the project's perceived success.

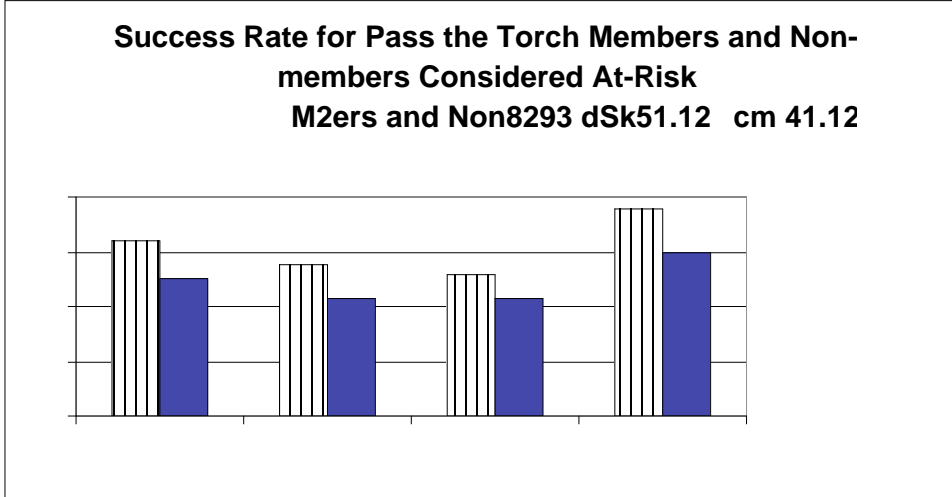
This evaluation assessed the impact of *Pass the Torch* on student academic success in mathematics and English core courses, as well as student retention at Foothill College. Of

Second, *Pass the Torch* members were less likely to withdraw from the College than non-members of similar at-risk status. For example, results for a 1997 cohort of students (students whose first term at Foothill was summer or fall of 1997) indicated that 11% of at-risk students who were *Pass the Torch* members left Foothill within a year, compared to a 63% for at-risk students who were not *Pass the Torch* members (See figures 3, 4, and 5, which show findings for three cohorts). With respect to student class retention, the analysis showed that at-risk students who were *Pass the Torch* members were less likely to withdraw from core courses. However, this finding was not replicated with students not considered at-risk, who showed no significant group differences with respect to class retention rates in core courses.

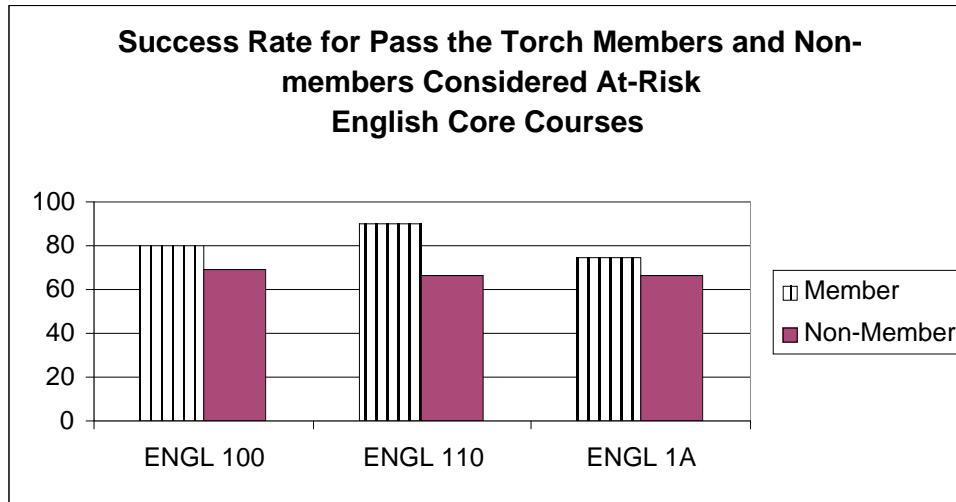
Third, the contribution of *Pass the Torch* in student academic success and retention rates is significant and independent of student previous knowledge. Results for all regression analyses, however, indicated that previous knowledge is the most important predictor of

It is also very likely that *Pass the Torch* members tend to developed a “network” of friends and grow more attached to the college.

**Figure 1.**



**Figure 2.**



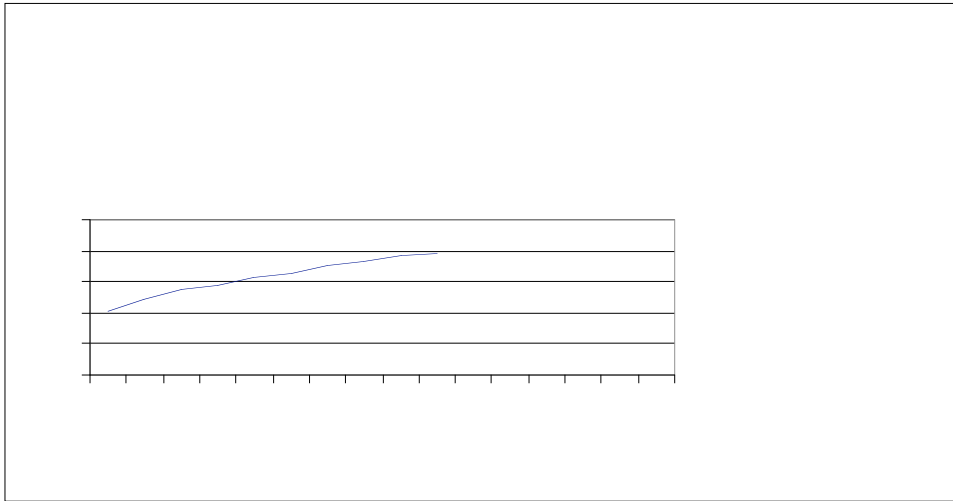
**Note:**

ENGL 100 = Introduction to College Reading; ENGL 110 = Introduction to College Writing; ENGL 1A= Composition & Reading

Success is a function of the letter grade for the class. Success rate refers to the percentage of attempts resulting in letter grades A, B, C, or P (a numeric value of 1) in the course. Non-successful attempts were those resulting in the letter grades D, W, NP or F (a numeric value of 0).

At-risk status refers to being a member of any of the following ethnic groups: Hispanics, African-Americans, or Native-Americans. Students in these ethnic groups are identified with a 1; otherwise, 0.

**Figure 3**



**Figure 5**

