

COMPLETE COLLEGE AMERICA

Transform Remediation: The Co-Requisite Course Model

For far too many students, postsecondary remedial education is a dead end. About 40 percent of all students entering postsecondary education in recent years have required remedial courses prior to enrolling in credit-bearing courses.ⁱ The problem is significant at all institutions but exceptionally dramatic at two-year colleges where about 60 percent of entering students require remediation. Unfortunately, students taking remedial courses are much less likely to graduate with a postsecondary degree than those not needing remediation.ⁱⁱ Quite frankly, postsecondary remedial education as currently conceived is failing to meet the needs of both students and institutions with ambitious college completion goals.

The problem starts with placement assessments and their failure to provide the information colleges need to support students' successful completion of credit-bearing courses.

- A variety of assessments and cut scores are used within and across states, providing no clear sense of what college readiness really means or what skills and knowledge are really necessary for success.
- Students' scores on these assessments reveal little about their actual weaknesses and what help they need to succeed at the college level.
- Students with similar placement test scores vary widely in their subsequent academic achievements, and those with scores just above the passing mark don't fare much better than others with scores just below it. In addition, many students who test out of remediation still struggle with college courses, and others who are referred to remediation but avoid it still succeed.ⁱⁱⁱ

Decisions based on placement test scores present multiple points at which a student can exit or fail a course in the sequence. Students can be referred to developmental courses ranging from one to three levels behind the entry-level college course in a subject. About one-third of all students assigned to remedial courses never take any remedial course in the relevant subject area, and as many as 40 percent of students referred to remedial courses in math never enroll.^{iv} About half of those who do enroll fail to complete their first developmental course, and less than 40 percent complete the entire sequence of recommended developmental courses.^v

Even among those students who successfully enroll in and exit remediation, about half of them never take the gateway courses for which they were supposedly

preparing.^{vi} Further, it is not clear that enrolling in and completing the remedial courses puts students on a better path to completing gateway courses or a degree. A recent Virginia community college study found that among students identified as needing remediation, those who did not take the remedial course to which they were referred were generally more likely to complete the gateway courses and/or earn a degree than those who did enroll.^{vii}

Clearly the developmental education system is broken. Fortunately, an emerging model suggests a new way most students can get the supplemental instruction they need to graduate on-time.

The Co-Requisite Course Model

Co-requisite developmental education enrolls students in remedial and college-level courses in the same subject at the same time. Students receive targeted support to help boost their understanding and learning of the college-level course material. This strategy can work at both two- and four-year institutions, the latter of which are often prohibited from providing remedial education. The concurrent course design allows four-year colleges and universities to offer the co-requisite developmental instruction as a non-credit, fee-based offering connected to a credit-bearing college course.^{viii}

Early results are showing that these initiatives are yielding better outcomes for students in less time and with significant savings for students and institutions. What they all have in common is a focus not just on the goal of improving remedial course completion but also, and more significantly, on completion of the entry-level, credit-bearing college courses that put students on a steadier path to completion.

The **Accelerated Learning Program** (ALP) at the Community College of Baltimore County allows students who did not pass the writing placement test by a small margin to enroll both in English 101 and a companion course that provides extra support. Designated sections of English 101 reserve eight of 20 seats for ALP students, and the course standards are the same as for all sections of English 101. The eight ALP students enroll in the companion course or workshop, which meets immediately following the English 101 course with the same instructor. The design removes some of the stigma of developmental courses and places ALP students in the classroom with stronger students who model better writing, study habits, and class participation. Students pay for six credits and receive three credits for English 101. The ALP students not only complete English 101 at nearly twice the rate of non-ALP students in traditional remedial courses, but they also go on to complete

English 102 at a higher rate and enroll in more college courses.^{ix} The program is catching on and has spread to 15 other colleges.

Through its **Developmental Studies Redesign Initiative**, Austin Peay State University (APSU) in Tennessee eliminated its two remedial math courses, Elementary Algebra and Intermediate Algebra, and instead offers enhanced sections of its two gateway (core), college-level mathematics courses. Developmental math students enroll in a core math course and a linked workshop simultaneously. Initial assessments determine each student's math weaknesses. During the linked workshops, students receive additional instruction on key math concepts and particularly on their identified weaknesses. The **Linked Workshop** facilitators, students who have excelled in math, also attend the core class with the developmental students and then review concepts presented in class during the workshop. Students completing the co-requisite workshop and core math courses have succeeded at more than twice the rate of those who previously took the traditional developmental courses. The pass rate for developmental students rose from 23 percent to 54 percent in Elements of Statistics and from 33 percent to 71 percent in Mathematical Thought and Practice. Furthermore, more of these students are returning and enrolling in college courses the following school year.^x

The **Texas State University-San Marcos FOCUS Program** allows students with math placement test scores in a range below but near the cut score to enroll simultaneously in remedial math and one of two options—college algebra or college algebra with statistics—depending on their academic and career needs. The students also receive two hours of tutoring each week on the same day as the class meets. Students who successfully complete the courses receive three credit hours for remedial math and three semester hours for either College Algebra or Elementary Statistics. Students may also receive one additional lab or course credit for completing the tutoring requirement. In pilot programs conducted in summer 2008 and summer 2010, remedial math students participating in the FOCUS program successfully completed college-level math courses at significantly higher rates than non-participants. Among the FOCUS pilot participants, 88 percent in summer 2008 and 74 percent in summer 2010 completed College Algebra with a grade of A, B, or C during their *first semester* of enrollment. Only 37.4 percent of all entering remedial students at Texas State University-San Marcos have typically completed a college-level math course with a grade of A, B, or C *within two years*.^{xi} Through the state's Intensive Summer Bridge Programs, Texas State is helping spread FOCUS to additional institutions and is providing faculty with training and creating a network of faculty that can learn from each other, share ideas, and provide support.

The **University of Maryland at College Park**, the state's flagship, public, four-year university, identifies about 20 percent of its incoming students as deficient in math and enrolls the top 60 percent of them, based on placement test scores, in a combined math course. The class meets five days a week, instead of three, for the entire semester. During the first five weeks, the students receive developmental instruction to help bolster their math knowledge and skills. They are then tested again using the same placement test. If the students score high enough, they are allowed to continue in the class, which is taught as a regular first-year math class for the remaining ten weeks of the semester. Over 80 percent were eligible to continue, and they successfully completed the course at the same rate as those students who had not been identified as needing remediation.^{xiii} The students who successfully complete the course earn three entry-level math credits.

Taking Action

State leaders should take action to stop the cycle of dead-end remedial education in colleges and support adoption of the co-requisite model as a strategy for improving remedial education, and ultimately, improving college completion rates.

Make co-requisite remedial education the norm for most students. Students who demonstrate a few academic deficiencies should be placed immediately into entry-level, credit-bearing college courses and co-requisite support courses. Similar to changes that make completion of college preparatory courses the default requirement for high school graduation, co-requisite placement should be the default for remedial education. Students with significant academic challenges should be offered skill certificate programs with embedded remediation.

Make community colleges the standard providers of remedial education.

Four-year public colleges and universities should stop providing remedial education except in limited cases where the co-requisite model is in place and students immediately enter credit-bearing courses. Community colleges should be the primary providers of remedial education, and they too should largely move to a model that allows students to immediately start earning credits toward a degree.

Vary the length and structure of the co-requisite support courses. Co-requisite remedial education occurs with—not in place of—regular, entry-level, credit-bearing college courses. Accelerated or compressed support courses vary in content, structure, and time to provide customized help targeted to the particular skill deficiencies of participating students. The critical change is that students *simultaneously enroll* in credit-bearing courses and start immediately earning credit toward a degree.

Remove regulatory barriers. State leaders should eliminate or change policies that make the co-requisite model difficult or impossible to implement, such as rules against students' concurrent enrollment in developmental and college-level courses.

Standardize course placement policies. State policymakers and postsecondary education leaders should develop policies at the state and institutional level for standardizing placement decisions and assessments. Consistent definitions for what constitutes college readiness and at what level remediation is necessary will help institutions better diagnose student weaknesses and develop co-requisite developmental courses that better meet student needs. Students with proficiency below high school level should be referred to adult basic education.

Collect and publicly report the CCA metrics, particularly those measuring success in first-year courses. The ultimate measure of college readiness and of productive remedial education is success in first-year, college-level gateway courses. State leaders should track state-, system-, campus-, and student-level data on success in first-year, college-level courses in core subjects, such as math and English. State leaders should also track additional related metrics on remedial education placement, completion of remedial math and English courses, and graduation rates disaggregated by remedial status. Publicly reporting these metrics in a consumer-friendly way is critical for informing the public and other key audiences and for ensuring the metrics drive decision-making at the state, system, and campus levels.

The current model of remediation does not promote credit accumulation or college completion. State leaders should act quickly and decisively to make significant changes before more students lose additional time and money to a system that does not promote attainment of a degree. Both state policymakers and postsecondary education leaders should explore these innovative co-requisite course models for improving remediation, improving course completion, and putting these students on a steadier path to college completion. States, institutions, and students may realize significant cost savings, and possibly additional revenues from increased earnings, that can be reinvested in replicating this and other strategies for improving college completion.

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- ⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), *The Condition of Education 2004* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2004), 63, retrieved July 3, 2011 from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2004/2004077_3.pdf; and Thomas Bailey, *Rethinking Developmental Education in Community College, CCRC Brief Number 40*, (New York: Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, February 2009), 2.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Thomas Bailey, *Community College Research Center Brief: Rethinking Developmental Education in Community College* (New York: Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, February 2009).
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- ^v Thomas Bailey, Dong Wook Jeong, and Sung-Woo Cho, *Student Progression Through Developmental Sequences in Community Colleges, CCRC Brief Number 45*, (New York: Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, September 2010), 3.
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- ^{xi} Texas Proposal Narrative Statements submitted to Complete College America, retrieved September 19, 2011 from <http://www.completecollege.org/docs/Texas%20Proposal%20Narrative%20Statements.pdf>.
- ^{xii} William W. Adams, *Developmental Mathematics: A New Approach*, retrieved September 19, 2011 from <http://www.maa.org/features/112103devmath.html>.