



## DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION REDESIGN IN OREGON

This is the third newsletter in a series that will highlight the efforts of Oregon's 17 community colleges to redesign developmental education and increase student success. These efforts address recommendations the Developmental Education Redesign Work Group consisting of teams from the 17 campuses developed between November 2013 and June 2014. [Click here](#) to read the report.

### On the Road to Salem

Faculty are the most important contributors to the success of any campus reform initiative, including efforts to redesign developmental education. Prior to May 2015, Dr. Verne Underwood, Chair of the Humanities Department at Rogue Community College (RCC), had some reservations about redesigning the college's developmental writing course sequence. He was confident in the college's placement exam's ability to appropriately assign students to developmental writing courses, and he believed that having three courses in the developmental writing sequence before the transfer-level course meant that the college was meeting students at their current writing level, giving them several steps to get to college-level work.

When the statewide Developmental Education Redesign Work Group released its recommendations in 2014, Dr. Underwood was apprehensive about the possibility of mandated changes coming from the state and limiting the college's current autonomy. "I was wary of efforts to replace the placement test and use uniform cut-off levels. Each college is unique, and I didn't want us to limit colleges' control over their curriculum," Dr. Underwood says. But he approached the effort with an open mind and a willingness to learn and participate. Last spring, he accepted an invitation to attend a statewide meeting in Salem to discuss the new placement recommendations. He credits this experience with shifting his perspective on the recommendations and inspiring him to become more deeply engaged with the work on his campus.

"I was impressed with Elizabeth's leadership [Cox Brand] and that the meeting was not top-down and that we were not told 'Here's what you are going to change.' It was more of an exploration of why these changes make sense. It made me realize it wasn't such a scary thing. John Hetts's presentation really changed my thinking. I didn't believe in using some of the potential placement measures he was advocating for, such as use of high school GPA, before. But he made a strong case that placement tests are good at showing if students are good at tests, not which class they belong in. Now I think there's a broad zone of measures we might use. We need to meet each student where they are, find out about their dedication and energy. There's a lot you can do to push them to the highest place possible."

-Verne Underwood, Rogue Community College

He's also rethought his views on the number of writing courses in the developmental sequence: "I used to think it was a good thing that we had so many developmental education writing courses. We had Writing 10, 20 and 30 before Writing 115, the transfer course, and Writing 121. The research is clear that this isn't a good thing—there are too many exit points. Students are languishing at low levels, and we give them many chances to quit." The worst thing we can do is tell students they have a year of developmental writing ahead of them; they just leave disappointed. We were leaving students heartbroken. They are making this huge, life-changing decision to go to college, and we are basically telling them, 'You don't belong here.'"

Dr. Underwood says his concerns about a top-down approach were also eased at the meeting. He describes the discussions as collaborative and collegial, and says that recommendations were presented not as mandates but as research-based opportunities for increasing student success. Campus choice and faculty input were highly respected, he noted.

Dr. Underwood is hopeful about the changes to developmental education at RCC: "There's an urgency to continue the work we have started, and we want to see it affect students positively sooner than later."

### A President's Perspective on Developmental Education Redesign

Committed leadership from the top is essential to transforming the way we ensure our students' success. Redesigning the developmental education process and curricula at Central Oregon Community College (COCC) is a top concern for college president Dr. Shirley Metcalf and her staff.

Dr. Metcalf has been involved in the college's redesign efforts in several capacities during her five-year tenure at COCC. During her time as the Interim Vice President for Instruction, she co-chaired the Student Success Committee with COCC's Dean of Students. The committee identified developmental education as a priority area with potential for impacting student success and began planning implementation of the recommendations developed by the statewide Developmental Education Redesign Work Group.

As president, Dr. Metcalf says “it isn’t just the President that counts.” She credits her faculty, administrators and board for championing this work. Last fall, COCC faculty and administrators in the college’s mathematics department implemented a new developmental sequence for non-STEM students. The COCC Board of Directors regularly discusses campus activities related to student success at each board meeting, and board members attend and present at statewide and national conferences about COCC progress and success.

Dr. Metcalf is optimistic about the future of developmental education at COCC: “I do believe that with continued cooperation between COCC and our local school districts, we can reduce the number of recent high school graduates who are in need of developmental coursework. Additionally, with the work being done by our math and writing faculty, I believe we can become more confident in our placement of students, strengthen our curriculum, streamline the offerings and get students prepared for collegiate level work more quickly, allowing them to achieve their dreams of becoming college graduates.”

“It is widely recognized that the number of entering students who must take developmental writing, reading or math is too high, and placement into developmental courses and the number of courses that may be required is quite discouraging. Therefore, this is a barrier to success for many students and one that I believe we can relieve. As a community college, we know many of our students come to us underprepared. While we can work with area high schools to help them better understand collegiate expectations, we will always have a pool of students, including those returning several years after high school, who need developmental education courses. It is up to us to put focus on this area to help students get through these courses successfully – and to be prepared for the remainder of their college career.”

*-Shirley Metcalf, Central Oregon Community College*

“Traditional placement policies assign students to a course based on one snapshot in time, one test score. I believe that we should use all information that we have about students—their high school GPA, how much time they will have to study, non-cognitive factors—to place them in the highest course in which they can succeed,” says Jim Whittaker, Vice President of Instruction. In math, students who initially place into the two lowest courses attend a two-week boot camp at the beginning of the term. At the end of the course, students can take an online challenge exam to place into a higher course beginning in the third week of the term. About 50 percent of students place one course higher after attending the boot camp. The college is also exploring ways to streamline the writing placement process, including allowing students to submit a writing sample in lieu of taking a placement test.

Dr. Cam Preus, President of BMCC, and Mr. Whittaker hope that in the near future BMCC’s placement policies will allow advisers and faculty to use all available information about students to place them into courses. Dr. Preus says, “I’d like to have developmental education students not categorized or separated but to be part of the general college population.”

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## Administrators’ Perspectives on Developmental Education Redesign

When administrators at Blue Mountain Community College (BMCC) began examining student success data, they discovered that only a small number of students were getting through the developmental education sequences and into gateway courses in math and writing. The BMCC math department worked with the statewide Developmental Education Redesign Work Group and to help shape the recommendations it released in 2014. BMCC’s math faculty have implemented the Work Group’s placement recommendations at BMCC.