



DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION REDESIGN IN OREGON

This is the first 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.

Mathematics At Blue Mountain Community College

Jim Whitaker, Vice President of Instruction at Blue Mountain, notes that a staggering number of the college's Associate of Arts Oregon Transfer (AAOT) degree and Associate of Science (AS) degree students placed into developmental education mathematics courses never complete college algebra, which is required for their declared major. He also notes that Blue Mountain is 100% committed to increasing completion rates on its campuses through redesigning their developmental math courses. Blue Mountain has decided that instead of basing class assignment on a placement test entirely, the college will work to place students in the highest level course in which they can succeed.

Blue Mountain's Jump Start Program does just that. Developmental education courses begin each quarter with a two week intensive preview of material that students will cover in that developmental math class. At the end of the two weeks, students take a challenge test to see if they can "jump" to the next course. This means developmental math classes technically start in week three. In weeks three to ten, students meet for more hours than they would typically, so the eight week course is the same number of hours as the ten week course used to be.

Initial data is promising. Whitaker reports that "in fall quarter, 53% of students enrolled in the pre-algebra Jump Start class and 45% of students enrolled in the elementary algebra Jump Start class passed their challenge tests. Of the students passing the challenge tests, 67% of the students who jumped into elementary algebra received a C or higher, while 73% of the other students received a C or higher. 76% of the students who jumped into intermediate algebra received a C or higher, while 70% of the other students received a C or higher."

Blue Mountain allows students to jump to the next level by other means as well. Students unhappy with their placement test results can ask for a review of their high school transcripts. Depending on the high school

mathematics courses the students took, how long ago they took them and the grades they received, they can earn higher placements than those that the test suggested. In the fall quarter, these reviews resulted in 20 students advancing one developmental math class and five students advancing two developmental math classes.

Whitaker points out that change has not been without challenge. Scheduling has been difficult, for instance. Since there is no way of knowing how many students will “jump” after the first two weeks, the math department has to guess the percentage of students who will “land” in each course. This means that instructors don’t know which courses they will be teaching until the third week of school. Blue Mountain addresses this challenge by staffing these classes with instructors that have taught all of the developmental education courses implicated by Jump Start and can quickly update a syllabus and have it ready on the first day of class. According to Whitaker, administration has not received any complaints from faculty about these changes and has heard nothing but positive feedback from students.

Placement and Assessment At Clackamas Community College

Clackamas does not have a mandatory testing and placement policy. Traditionally, however, students have been strongly encouraged to complete the COMPASS exams prior to enrolling in coursework. The campus used student scores to recommend either developmental or college-level courses in English and math. Darlene Geiger, Associate Dean of Academic Foundations and Connections at Clackamas Community College, reports that Clackamas had employed this common practice for many years, and that she and her colleagues have been grappling with the discouraging success rates for students who enroll in developmental education classes. Data presented at the Developmental Education Redesign Work Group showed that students placed into developmental education classes were not likely to complete their programs. Geiger and her colleagues decided they not only wanted better results, they also wanted to change the welcome experience to emphasize a conversation rather than a test. “We knew,” Geiger notes, “we had to change what we were doing.”

Clackamas has in fact changed its placement practices and hopes to place more students who might otherwise have started in developmental education in college-level coursework and do at least as well as their peers whose COMPASS scores identified college-level courses as appropriate placements. The absence of a mandatory assessment and placement policy allowed the campus to pilot the Placement Advising for Student Success (PASS) program with students who placed into developmental math, reading and/or writing.

As in the past, students still get the results of their COMPASS scores immediately. However, the exam is no longer the only source of information a student may use to make his or her enrollment decisions. Students now have the option to meet with a PASS advisor who is either an English or Math teacher who office together in the Testing Center nine hours every week. The PASS advisors are there to discuss with students whether they should consider passing on to a higher level course than what their test scores suggest.

Students have the option of meeting with the PASS advisors immediately or they may schedule an appointment. There are also triggers that the Testing Center staff can use to encourage students to meet with a PASS advisor: when a student is close to the COMPASS cut-off score, when the student has expressed anxiety about test-taking, and/or if

the student is a recent high school graduate with a transcript in hand. Through a discussion in which the PASS advisor considers both academic (e.g., high school transcripts) and non-academic factors (e.g., evidence of study skills and time management as well as work hours and family obligations), the student and PASS advisor decide whether the student should enroll in higher level math and/or writing courses, and they discuss options for support services that would be important for success. “It’s an honest conversation during which the student and the PASS faculty advisor discuss whether a higher placement is realistic given the information shared,” Geiger says.

“How many important decisions in life are based on just one criterion? In education we try to process large groups of people in the same way because it’s efficient but it’s not effective. We are challenging ourselves to find a way that we can address individual needs while also reaching the masses.”
--Darlene Geiger, Clackamas Community College

Since fall term, 198 students have met with a PASS advisor during their placement process. Although Geiger notes the data on how well these students performed will be available later this summer, she says the vast majority of the 198 students were placed into a higher level course or courses than their test scores would have suggested. In addition, preliminary data from a sample group of 22 math students who experienced the PASS conversation during winter quarter placement reveals that 87% earned C or better in the higher-level course. PASS appears to be working.

The next task, Geiger says, is to expand the use of multiple measures beyond 198 students. Because two faculty members working nine hours a week in the testing center cannot reach all incoming students during their placement experience, faculty members are working on an “intake form” that students will complete. Testing Center staff, campus advisors and select faculty would then be able to use the tool in conversations with students. It will collect information about a student’s academic history as well selected non-academic information, which can be used to measure dispositions like grit and personal obligations outside of school. Again, Geiger concludes, “We hope the tool will provide guidance for course placement, with the right supports, in the highest level course that students can pass.”

English At Linn-Benton Community College

Even before the Developmental Education Redesign Work Group completed its recommendations, Linn-Benton Community College was making changes to help more students achieve success. Particularly noteworthy is the success the campus has achieved in the redesign of its developmental education writing program, which Chris Riseley, English faculty member at Linn-Benton Community College, reports has led to a doubling of completion rates for WR 121.

Traditionally, Linn-Benton Community College students placed into developmental education in writing started in either WR 90, WR 95 or WR 115. This means that a student could have to take up to three quarters of writing before enrolling in a college-level course. Linn-Benton Community College found that only 29% of its students who began in

“We find that by the fifth week of the ALP, some ALP students have had so much intensive writing practice that they are actually becoming stronger writers than students that tested directly into WR 121.”

--Chris Riseley, Linn-Benton Community College

WR 95 completed WR 121. To see more students placed into developmental education complete the required college level WR 121, Linn-Benton Community College created an Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) for WR 121. Students are invited to the ALP by passing WR 90 or 95 with a C grade or better, or by testing into WR 95 or 115.

The ALP allows students to skip over the developmental courses and enroll directly in a college-level course. However, these students must simultaneously enroll in a credit-bearing support class that takes place directly following the WR 121 class. Students stay in the same room with the same instructor and have a second hour of class where they get concentrated, more individualized support. Only 10 students per WR 121 class are part of the ALP, meaning that the support class has only 10 students.

The ALP is driving student success. In the traditional sequence of courses, only 29% of students testing into WR 95 ever complete WR 121. Those testing into WR 95 and entering the ALP have seen a 72% completion rate in WR 121.

Linn-Benton Community College plans to scale up this program and hopes to eventually have very few WR 95 or 115 classes. Those classes, notes Riseley, will still be available for students who need them, but the goal is to have as many students as possible enrolling directly into college-level writing courses.

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