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OSSC
Oregon Student Success Center
For the past four years, Oregon’s community colleges have been tipping over sacred cows in developmental education. As practiced for decades, the traditional developmental education paradigm has been one that appears logical: Consider incoming student’s abilities using a single measure—a standardized test—take students whom the assessments determine are not college ready and place them in developmental reading, writing and mathematics course sequences to prepare them for the college-level courses they need for their degree, certificate or matriculation to four-year institutions.

Our logic, however, has been as stifling to student success as it has been flawed. The vast majority of developmental education students in fact never enroll in or pass gateway classes in reading and writing and mathematics. The long four-, six- and even eight-quarter developmental education sequences conflicts with students’ desire to start college, not sit through remediation. They drain bank accounts, increase the number of potential exit points and require coursework that may not at all be relevant to a student’s chosen career path. Yet, for years, we have been strangled by tradition.

Community College systems across the country have for several years now been addressing these challenges, usually through top-down efforts dictated by state legislatures. What makes Oregon unique is that no external mandate from the legislature or governor predicated the efforts of our 17 community colleges. In Oregon, these campuses volunteered to participate in a process to redesign developmental education in our state, the mandate for which came from campus staff, faculty and administrators: those closest to the problem and those most capable of producing solutions.

This is not to suggest that state-level policy does not at times become necessary. It becomes necessary when we become stifled by our past, clinging to beliefs that it is our students, not our own policies and practices, that are detrimental to success.

After four years of work with the 17 campuses, I can say without hesitation that tradition has been no jailer. Campuses are implementing new math pathways for non-STEM students, new multiple measure placement systems, co-requisites and other accelerated learning models for reading and writing and new supports in student services. As the recommendation section of this report suggests, however, we are long on reforms and still short on data. As a community college community, we’re going to need to do a better job of collecting, synthesizing and reporting data to make the case that what we’ve done as a community responds to our mandate.

As we celebrate the past four years and prepare to address the absence of data and other challenges, I want to say how grateful I am to the college presidents who nearly four years ago had the vision to approve funding from their strategic fund to support the work of campus teams. And I am thankful to the campus teams of administrators, faculty and staff who devoted their time first to a year-long series of team meetings and then to three-years of implementation work.

This four-year retrospective acknowledges your innovative efforts and points to the work that remains ahead of us.
Introduction: Why We Did the Work

A unique American invention, the community college is an open-access community-based and community-focused institution that makes a college-education and career opportunities available to those who may have thought them beyond reach.

Community colleges serve nearly half of the college-going population in the United States. They also serve a population that is diverse. The American Community College Association reports that while 49 percent of students enrolled in courses for credit are white, 22 percent are Hispanic, 14 percent African American and 6 percent Asian/Pacific Islander. A striking 36 percent are in the first generation of their family to attend college.1

Though community colleges are an essential part of the system of American education, in 2013-14 when the Developmental Education Redesign Work Group consisting of representatives from the 17 campuses first convened, they found that these institutions have not been working for everyone who attends them. In particular, the Work Group learned, they had not been working for students assigned to developmental education.2 Research showed that community colleges and four-year institutions referred 60 percent of all entering students to developmental education. For Oregon’s community colleges in 2012-13, that figure was 58 percent, 63 percent for students entering community college from high school and 69 percent for African American Students.3

These students, research showed, were far less likely to earn a college credential. In fact, the more developmental education courses a student took to get to a college-level course, the less likely that student was to graduate.4 Data revealed to the group that the vast majority of developmental education students do not complete a corresponding college-level course—a course at the first level of college credit—within their first two academic years. For English, that number was 59 percent. For math, it was 74 percent. For students taking both developmental education courses in math and English, the number jumped to 84 percent who do not complete.5 And providing more time to complete a degree had little impact. Giving a full-time community college student an extra year to earn an associate’s degree increased the graduation rate by only five percent.6

This report focuses on how Oregon’s Community Colleges confronted these significant challenges:

- The process employed to produce solutions
- The solutions produced
- Results from the implementation of these solutions
- Recommendations for the future

The report draws on information collected for the project’s annual reports and newsletters from 2014-2016—all available on the developmental education resource page on its website—interviews conducted with select campus team leads in April and May 2017 and information submitted to OCCA by email in April and May 2017.

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The Solution: An Abiding Commitment to Campuses as the Drivers for Change

It was with the poor performance of the traditional developmental education paradigm in mind that the Oregon Presidents’ Council responded affirmatively to a proposal submitted by a steering committee of faculty and administrators for developing recommendations to redesign developmental education in the state. The Council allocated money from a strategic fund created to support innovative projects that benefit all the colleges. The Council endorsed a proposal that would provide each campus with $9,000 to pay the travel expenses for teams to attend monthly day-long meetings. All 17 presidents signed up for the effort, setting the stage for what has now become a four-year effort to improve student success by redesigning developmental education.

At the core of the effort is the philosophy that if campus teams had the opportunity to learn about the old developmental education paradigm and new practices that are emerging, they would use that knowledge to generate and then implement recommendations. Meeting planners employed that philosophy throughout, especially during three critical stages—the development of comprehensive recommendations for developmental education reform, the creation of a pathway to allow non-STEM mathematics progressions and the development of a recommendation for the placement of students into their initial courses.

Campuses Lead the Development of Recommendations to Redesign Developmental Education:

It was the steering committee—consisting of a cross-section of campus faculty, staff and administrators—that crafted the initiative’s goals:

- To identify practices that decrease time to completion (i.e., to degree, certificate or matriculation)
- To identify practices that can decrease student attrition from the point of taking the placement test to completion
- To identify state or community college policies that can promote student completion and decrease attrition
Seventeen campus teams then met between October 2013 and June 2014. With the support of OCCA, the Steering Committee divided the series of meetings into two stages. The first stage focused on an examination of the traditional paradigm of developmental education and research exposing the fact that it is not working. It met with several experts, debated their assertions and findings from research and together constructed a body of knowledge that they would employ in the second stage.

During the second stage, participants divided up into teams that used the knowledge they developed to craft recommendations to redesign developmental education in four key areas: mathematics, reading and writing, student services and placement. Each of the Developmental Education Redesign Work Group’s sub-groups engaged in rigorous debate about what would be best for Oregon community college students write large and the student bodies on each of the 17 unique campuses each with their own governing boards—all within the context of a state that, unlike most others, does not have a community college system. By the end of the process, each sub-group had settled on a number of recommendations that the Work Group as a whole endorsed, with the expectation that campuses would not necessarily implement all the recommendations but rather pick and choose among them.

For a complete list of the Work Group’s recommendations, see the Developmental Education Redesign Work Group’s first year report.

Campus Math Faculty Lead the Development of New Math Pathway

In the Fall of 2014, Oregon community college math faculty including those actively involved in the Workgroup, took it upon themselves to organize a meeting with colleagues from all 17 community colleges and four public universities. They also invited the Oregon Department of Education (ODE), the Oregon Office of Community Colleges and Workforce Development (CCWD) and the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC). Over the course of two, day-long meetings and email exchanges in the fall of 2014, the group agreed on common outcomes for two courses in a new non-STEM pathway, MATH 98 and MATH 105. Next, the university provosts and community college instructional administrators gave their support to the work and, in the spring of 2015, the HECC concurred, officially making the non-STEM pathway an option for completion of the requirements for the Associate of Arts Oregon Transfer Degree.

Highlights of June 2014 Recommendations:

Mathematics:
Create an alternate non-STEM pathway appropriate for the student’s career goals.

Reading and Writing:
Consider strongly the adoption of models that accelerate learning to reduce exit points and support students’ entry into college courses, including career and technical courses. Students must be encouraged, advised and allowed to complete developmental education classes in one to two terms. Examples of acceleration include: (1) integrating reading and writing courses, (2) combining levels of reading or writing (i.e. Reading 80 with Reading 90), (3) providing an option of a reading and writing developmental course co-requisite with a college level course, and (4) enhancing the combined course or co-requisite models by creating intentional learning communities so that students experience a culture of success.

Student Services:
Create a mandatory advising process for all developmental education students and deliver advising through professional advisors and/or faculty who have received training in the CAS professional standards and/or current research in advising best practices.

Placement:
Convene a body of community college, university, and high school representatives with appropriate expertise to consider recommendations to the state that promote using multiple measures to place students, including non-cognitive measures (for example, work schedule, child care situation, motivation, self-confidence and grit), the GED, Smarter Balanced, Advanced Placement and IB exams, high school transcripts and/or grade point average.

Experts included Bruce Vandal from Complete College America, Myra Snell from Los Medanos Community College, Peter Adams from Baltimore Community College, Nikki Edgecombe from the Community College Resource Center, Michelle Hodara from Education Northwest and Irma Camacho from El Paso Community College.
Campus Teams Pave the Way for Multiple Measure Placement Systems

Project leaders employed a similar campus-centered design in the effort to address the placement recommendation—that they convene a body of representatives to consider recommendations to the state that promote using multiple measures to place students—with the overarching goal being that campuses place fewer students into developmental education.

In late summer 2015, OCCA convened the Developmental Education Redesign Placement Work Group to address the initial work group’s placement recommendations born of the concern that far too many students are placed into developmental education. Like the Developmental Education Redesign Work Group, it consisted of teams from the state’s 17 community colleges. Concurrently, in response to HB2681, the Higher Education Coordinating Commission began meeting to discuss the process it would use to develop recommendations to the Oregon State Legislature to improve the process of placing students at community colleges.

To avoid duplicating efforts, the HB2681 Committee and the Placement Work Group joined forces and began meeting with each other. Both groups participated in two webinars and three day-long in-person meetings in Salem. They learned about and discussed the issues and reviewed research presented by Michelle Hodara, a senior researcher from Education Northwest, and John Hetts, former Director of Institutional Research for Long Beach City College and now the Senior Director for Data Science for the Educational Results Partnership.8

The Placement Work Group recommended to the HB2681 Committee that Oregon’s community colleges should move from using only a standardized assessment as the default placement tool for all students and toward a system of multiple measures to increase the accuracy of placement decisions. The HB2681 Committee embedded this recommendation in its report to the legislature.

8 From John Hetts, the Work Group learned that community college placement processes are substantially underestimating student capacity; that actual measures of student performance such as high school grade point average and last grade in course more accurately predict college performance than do standardized assessments; self-reported grade point average may be a better indicator than an actual score on a standardized test; and the more measures the greater the accuracy of a placement decision, and a standardized test such as Accuplacer, can be one of those measures. See the PowerPoint he presented to Oregon campuses here.
Major Reforms and Results: Leading and Lagging Indicators

Oregon’s developmental education reformers can measure results in both leading and lagging indicators. As a relatively new initiative, leading indicators are more visible than lagging. Leading indicators are measures of the changes campuses have made – new policies and pathways for mathematics, new multiple-measure placement systems or advising policies, accelerated learning programs such as co-requisites. At this point in the movement, lagging indicators—measures of student success, such as completion and attrition rates—are understandably sparse, more sparse because campus efforts are new and because Oregon’s community colleges are not part of a system, making it more challenging to have a state-wide coherent collection of data that would allow us to collectively measure improvement in student outcomes. Still, this report presents both leading and lagging indicators in mathematics, placement, reading and writing and student services.

Mathematics

After leaders in the Oregon Community College math community had cleared the way for campuses to begin planning and implementing new math pathways that would not require those with their sites on careers in non-STEM fields to take the traditional math pathway. Campuses immediately began planning and implementing them. Anticipating the success of the community colleges’ efforts to allow a new math pathway, Treasure Valley and Lane began implementing one in the fall of 2014. Lane also reduced the developmental education math pathway for non-STEM students from five courses to three (Math 20, 98 and 105). Portland, Columbia Gorge and Clatsop followed with implementation in the winter and spring terms of 2015. Central Oregon, Southwestern and Blue Mountain soon followed. Today, all but two of Oregon’s community college campuses are offering the new math pathway, eliminating long developmental math sequences that end with intermediate algebra and that have long been a barrier to student success.9 Portland Community College produced a compelling video about why the change is so important to so many of Oregon’s student success (see sidebar).

Placement

In just the short time since the Placement Work Group completed its work, more than half of the state’s community college campuses have implemented multiple measure placement systems, are piloting them or have one in the works.

- In 2016-17, Central Oregon piloted new placement procedures for writing, which include lower cut scores for sentence fluency and an interview with an advisor following a placement test.
- Math placement at Tillamook Bay includes distinctions between students who have graduated from high school within the last two years and those who have not and uses high school grades in Algebra I and/or Algebra II and an interview that includes a student self-assessment.
- Umpqua now considers for mathematics placement high school transcripts, Smarter Balanced scores, Accuplacer and ALEKS placement scores and the GED examination.
- Because of its small size, Oregon Coast operates one section of the non-STEM pathway per term (Math 58, 98 and 105). In the fall of 2015, when the campus placed students using the COMPASS math test, 72 percent of students passed their math course, while in the fall of 2016 when all students guided their own placement (without a test), 77 percent of students passed their courses.10
- At Southwestern, there is now more intrusive advising during the intake process. For writing, advisors consider Accuplacer, Smarter Balanced and GED scores as well as dual-enrollment coursework. They hold longer advising sessions and place students using multiple measures, including high school grade point average—though they have the latitude to make determinations about the rigor of high school coursework in making a final determination.
- Rogue now uses high school grade point averages for some students who have just graduated from high school and is working on an online application to automate its system so that advisors can determine which students can easily bypass testing and meet with advisors.

10 Interview with Ben Kauffman, May 2017.
Clackamas and Portland have perhaps been the most aggressive implementers of new systems. First-year data collected by Clackamas reveals its success. Clackamas reports that “students participating in the multiple measure PASS pilot program were placed 2.20 math levels higher than they would have been with a placement test alone, and these students performed just as well. This higher placement resulted in saving these students 2.20 terms of math class time, reducing their extra costs for these additional credits, and achieving their educational goal faster.” For writing, the campus reports that participating writing students were placed 0.57 levels higher than the placement test alone would have warranted, “saving these students 0.57 terms of class time.”

As Figure A suggests, Clackamas’s new placement process combined with new pathway options has led to a decline in the percentage of developmental education math students and an increase in transfer level courses. In academic year 2013-14, developmental students made up 62.2 percent of all math students. That number declined to 52.6 percent in the 2015-16 academic year. Transfer-level students grew from 37.8 percent to 47.4 percent of all math students. During this same time period, lower-level developmental students (MATH-065 and below) fell from 48.7 percent to 34.7 percent of all math students (a 13.9-point decrease).

Figure A: Enrollment for Developmental and Transfer Level Math Courses at Clackamas

Spotlight on Placement

Clackamas:
At Clackamas, the intake process now begins by focusing on student goals. In the past, all students began their placement process in the Testing Center with a test. Now, a student’s placement process begins with an intake form, a conversation using multiple measures, and identification of support services to improve success rates. Self-reported grade point average and recent grades in math and English courses are taken into consideration, as well as perceptual measures such as how students “feel” about math, reading and writing. Additional tools designed to support a self-directed placement process include: a) flow charts that guide students, college staff, faculty and high school teachers through placement options for math and writing coursework; b) samples of actual math problems to prompt discussion; c) color-coded math pathway scheme; and d) a referral form for prompting access to both academic and non-academic supports. The math and writing placement guides rely on specific course grades, grade point average, commitments outside of school and previous academic experience. Advisors and college support staff, including the high school partnership and welcome center offices use the tools to suggest placement options most appropriate for the student goal. If placement is still uncertain, students are referred to a special placement advising program that allows them to meet one-on-one with math and writing faculty.

11Clackamas Community College PASS Communication Overview, Provided by Darlene Geiger, May 2017
12 From personal communication from Stefan, Beratto to Darlene, Geiger, Clackamas Community College, May 8, 2017.
Reading and Writing

The Developmental Education Work Group recommended that colleges adopt for reading and writing coursework accelerated learning models. Education Northwest reports that the most common model adopted by the campuses has been combining developmental education reading and writing courses. Several campuses report that they have done just that.

Clatsop has combined reading and writing developmental study in a single language arts course (LA90) to prepare students for Writing 115 or Writing 121, shortening the developmental path for students not fully prepared for college level work.

Mount Hood began piloting a combined reading and writing course offered as part of a learning community in the fall of 2016.

Tillamook Bay redesigned its reading and writing sequences and Reading 090 and Writing 090 are now combined as one course: Reading/Writing 090. The same action has been taken with Reading 115 and Writing 115 (now Reading/ Writing 115).

Southwestern Oregon has combined Reading 90 with Writing 90, which will reduce the number of credits required from six to four.

Central Oregon combined its writing and reading developmental education literacy courses more than 10 years ago and has recently focused on reviving professional development.

Linn-Benton’s developmental writing faculty are working to re-integrate some reading/student success topics into WR90 and 95 courses, without increasing the credit load of those courses.

Campuses have also pursued co-requisite models, combining developmental education with college level courses. In fact, during its 2016 session, the Oregon legislature passed and Governor Brown signed into law SB 5701, which provided funding for various purposes, one of which was to foster co-requisite courses for developmental education writing.

The bill appropriated $600,000 for the work. The HECC has been administering the funds and, with the support of OCCA, asked campuses to state whether they were ready to either implement/scale pilots in spring 2017 or plan for future implementation. Lane, Chemeketa, Blue Mountain, Linn-Benton, Southwestern and Oregon Coast committed to implementing in spring of 2017, Central Oregon, Clackamas and Tillamook Bay committed to planning.
LinnBenton reports that it has created an Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) for Writing 121. Students are invited to the ALP by passing Writing 90 or 95 with a C grade or better, or by testing into Writing 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.

Rogue and Umpqua have also implemented co-requisites. Formerly a standalone developmental education course, Rogue’s Writing 30 is now combined with the college’s first 100 level writing course. Umpqua now offers Writing 95 concurrently with Writing 115 and 121.

“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. Verne Underwood, Chair Humanities Department, Rogue Community College
Student Services

Education Northwest reports that the student services recommendations most often addressed by campuses include initial mandatory advising followed by mandatory orientation, the implementation of early alert systems and first year experiences. Reforms at Columbia Gorge, Clatsop, Klamath, Southwestern and Clackamas represent a sampling of efforts:

**Columbia Gorge** adopted a policy to provide early alerts for students who may be struggling or underperforming and implemented a program that helps students make sound financial decisions about their education.

**Clatsop** faculty developed eight guided pathways—art, English, biology, history, mathematics, physics, pre-med/pre-dental/pre-physical therapy/pre-veterinary and psychology/social services—that facilitate strong advising and course selection.

**Klamath** made advising mandatory and is supporting specially trained advisors for developmental education students, providing faculty staff and administrators advising training and leveraging its course management system more fully to survey students in targeted developmental courses. Klamath also redesigned the content of its training for new student orientation to better meet the needs of developmental students.

**Southwestern Oregon** has continued its more-than-a-decade long tradition of requiring mandatory advising and employing an early alert system. It also requires a mandatory orientation and first-year experience. Developmental Education students are also required to take one college success course, such as study skills or career planning.

**Clackamas** has begun to offer a first-year experience for all students enrolled in developmental education.
Each campus must set clear goals and collect, synthesize and report data related to its developmental education reforms not only to improve them but to make the case to stakeholders—both within and outside the institution—that reforms are leading to student success. For this developmental education redesign initiative, most campuses have been reform rich but data and reporting poor. Oregon’s community colleges are not a system, operating independently of each other. This is both a strength and a weakness. One of the weaknesses is that campuses do not consistently or systematically collect, synthesize and report common data to a system or set goals. OCCA recommends therefore that each campus engage in a systematic data collection effort that takes into account the reforms it has implemented, synthesizes that data and makes the reports available to its governing bodies and other stakeholders. The reports should include leading and lagging indicators, such as the percent of students enrolled in developmental education by discipline, the percent in each math pathway, co-requisites or other accelerated learning efforts, the duration of developmental sequences and ultimately attrition and the percentage of students who receive a degree or certificate within a certain span of time.

Campuses should formalize structures to maintain or accelerate the momentum for developmental education redesign. Establishing annual reporting requirements and goals will help, as will maintaining and supporting a cross-department developmental education design leadership team that can continue to set direction, monitor progress and suggest improvements based on data collection. Through the life of this project, campus team leaders reported that not all faculty and staff are engaged in redesign efforts—or understand or believe in them. Changing minds is difficult and having a team that can continue to work with faculty and staff to manage change on each campus is essential.

By 2020, all campuses should be implementing placement systems that rely on more than one measure and that reflect research. A single measure—whether it be a measure other than a placement exam—does not a multiple measure system make. Meeting on more than three occasions with John Hetts, campuses learned that placement is most accurate when those making decisions are able to triangulate data. Moreover, campuses learned from Hetts that high school grade point average remains a strong measure of success much longer than two years after high school completion. Some campuses have made strong movement in this direction, willing to accept grades that are two years old. Yet, over time, they might consider moving in the direction that Portland has gone, keeping the window open for seven years.

Campuses should, over time, add to their portfolio of developmental education reforms. New placement systems and math pathways will never be enough in and of themselves. Reform efforts must be comprehensive. If campuses do not implement accelerated courses in writing, new math pathways—a profound and groundbreaking reform—will not result in higher completion rates. The reverse is also true. The set of reforms recommended by the Developmental Education Redesign Workgroup must remain on the radar screen of all campuses.
Conclusion: Oregon’s Community Colleges Rise to the Challenge

Oregon’s 17 community colleges have provided an invaluable lesson to reformers of developmental education: Campuses themselves can lead the change process after they have been given the opportunity to learn about the problem, reflect on it and plan a response.

The support provided by the President’s Council allowed campus teams to spend nine months meeting with experts, reviewing data, reflecting on what they learned and producing a comprehensive set of recommendations to change the life trajectory of students traditionally placed into long developmental education sequences. Following, teams of math faculty led the development of new math pathways that should lead to more and more of Oregon’s students achieving their dreams of earning a certificate or degree. And another work group of 17 faculty teams examined new multiple measure placement practices and they are now implementing, piloting or exploring them.

Though data is still limited, there is great cause for hope. The Higher Education Coordinating Commission recently reported that pass rates in developmental education courses have been increasing gradually. Figure B shows that they have increased from nearly 64 percent in 2011-12 to 71 percent in the fall term of 2016-17.\footnote{Memorandum to the Oregon Presidents Council from P.Crane, Higher Education Coordinating Commission, March 24, 2017.}

This is strong evidence of success. More is needed. Ultimately, the proof of the success of developmental education redesign in Oregon will be found in the data campuses collect and report.

Still, a strong four-year effort by all 17 campuses portends greater success for Oregon’s students.

Figure B: Pass Rates for Developmental Education Courses Offered by Oregon’s Seventeen Community College Campuses

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