

Draft

Creating Quality Developmental Education

A Guide to the Top Ten Actions Community College
Administrators Can Take to Improve Developmental
Education

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A Guide to the Top Ten Actions Community College Administrators Can Take to Improve Developmental Education

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How to use this guide

This guide lists the top ten practices that contribute to successful developmental education in community colleges as identified by the National Center for Developmental Education. The practices selected for inclusion here are those that have a strong research base to support them, are widely used in community colleges, and have demonstrated the potential for improving student completion of developmental courses, grades in developmental courses, and persistence in college.

The practices are listed from number 10 to number 1. Although practices 1 through 5 show the greatest potential for improving developmental education, all of them are important and all ten items should be addressed at some level.

Each practice is described in a manner that allows community college administrators to implement them on their own campuses. At the end of this guide a questionnaire is provided for the purpose of self assessment of these practices. By reflecting upon these questions and answering them honestly, community college administrators can determine the extent to which these practices are present on their campuses.

10. Make developmental education a campus priority.

Developmental education is most successful when it is considered a campus-wide priority. Because 70% or more of a community college's incoming students are likely to place into developmental courses and the majority of the college's graduates are likely to have taken at least one developmental course, it is obviously a major endeavor (McCabe, 2003). But many community college leaders still resist making developmental education a priority. Even many who consider it to be a priority may not know how to communicate that priority to faculty, staff, and students.

Making developmental education a campus priority requires that the college's administrators aggressively and persistently promote

developmental education. They can do this through comments at faculty gatherings, discussions with campus leaders, and remarks delivered to the community. In fact, administrators should take advantage of every opportunity to emphasize the importance of developmental education on their campus. This includes explaining the role of developmental education at the college to the local community and generating community support for developmental education.

Administrators should also follow up their verbal commitments with visible demonstrations of their support for developmental education. Such demonstrations would include insuring that developmental education is part of the college's long range planning efforts. Whenever plans are being made for the future, the needs of developmental education should be included in those plans.

Similarly, the needs of developmental education should be taken into consideration during the resource allocation process, not as an afterthought. Representatives of the campus developmental education effort should be "at the table" when resources are being allocated. This does not necessarily mean that developmental education will get a larger share of the available resources but it does make it more likely that those resources will be deployed in a manner that is most beneficial to the developmental education effort.

Furthermore, those who teach developmental courses should have the same status and the same access to salary increases, tenure, and promotion as all other campus faculty. This not only makes a statement about the importance of developmental education but also makes a positive contribution to the morale of developmental faculty.

9. Facilitate students' completion of developmental courses.

According to a recent report from the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (2008), students who complete their developmental education requirements are four times more likely to graduate from college than those who do not. Research by Boylan and Saxon (2006) indicates that students who complete one developmental course and immediately take the next level developmental course are more likely to be retained than students who postpone taking the next level course.

Unfortunately, there tends to be relatively high attrition rates in developmental courses. For example, it is not uncommon for attrition rates in developmental mathematics courses to exceed 40%.

Administrators, therefore, need to take action to both reduce attrition in developmental courses and to insure that those who do complete developmental courses immediately take the next level course, either developmental or college level. Some of the actions that will lead to these outcomes include the following:

- Require students to continually enroll in developmental courses until their developmental requirements are completed or until they have otherwise demonstrated mastery of the subject matter.
- Ensure that students take the next level developmental course or the first level college course as soon as they have completed the previous developmental education course.
- Train faculty in instructional techniques such as active learning that will make developmental courses more interesting and meaningful to students.
- Ensure that the exit standards for each level of developmental courses are consistent with the next level developmental or college level courses.

8. Require assessment and appropriate placement.

Practically all community colleges require that at least some students be assessed upon entry. It is reasonable to exempt some students from assessment for reasons such as high scores on high school exit or SAT and ACT exams, or for prior military service. However, the number of exemptions should be kept to a minimum to ensure that students and advisors have accurate assessment data on which to make decisions about placement in developmental education. Furthermore, if assessment data is not used to place incoming students into courses they need to succeed, the entire assessment process is undermined.

Although there are many instruments available for assessing the skills of incoming students, the COMPASS™ (an ACT product) and the Accuplacer® (an ETS product), are now the instruments most frequently used to by community colleges. Both of these are computer adaptive tests which adjust the difficulty of each question based on responses to a previous question. This technique substantially increases the accuracy of assessment while reducing the amount of time required to assess students. The Texas Higher Education Assessment (THEA) is also a quality computerized, criterion-referenced assessment instrument.¹

¹ The Texas Higher Education Assessment is the only instrument that is actually referenced directly to college level skills instead of being norm-referenced.

Mandatory placement into the appropriate developmental courses is also an important key to successful developmental education. Yet many community colleges either fail to make placement on the basis of assessment mandatory, or they allow significant numbers of students who place into developmental education to “fall through the cracks” and avoid taking developmental courses. Community college administrators need to require placement on the basis of assessment. Otherwise, many students will have little hope of completing college level courses.

Students may resist the idea of spending an extra three to nine hours in developmental courses because it takes more time and costs more money. Some advisors may even encourage this notion. However, those students who place in developmental courses and do not take them are equally likely to fail the first college-level course two or three times.

7. Coordinate developmental education activities.

There are three organizational models typically used in developmental education. One is a **centralized** program where all developmental courses and support services are housed under a single unit or department. Another is a **decentralized** program where all developmental courses are taught through their individual academic departments and support services are provided separately. A third is a **blended** program where some courses and services are centralized and others are separate.

The centralized model of developmental education has consistently proven to be more effective. However, among U.S. community colleges the dominant model is the decentralized program. About 60% of community college programs are decentralized and the remaining 40% are either decentralized or blended (Schults, 2001).

One quality that makes the centralized model for developmental education effective is that it ensures appropriate coordination and communication among those providing developmental courses and services. Coordination and communication are generally seen as hallmarks of successful developmental programs. While centralized programs seem to inherently support these processes, any of the organizational models may work as long as there is a concerted effort to promote systematic coordination and communication among the personnel providing developmental courses and services.

Well-coordinated developmental programs are characterized by the following:

- There is a clear statement of the campus philosophy for developmental education.
- There is a clear statement of goals and objectives for developmental education.
- There is a single administrator responsible for ALL campus courses and services related to developmental education.
- This administrator reports directly to the Dean of Instruction or Vice President for Academic Affairs.
- Those teaching developmental courses and providing support services, or their representatives, meet on a regular basis (least twice a semester) to discuss problems and issues in developmental education.
- Formative evaluation information is provided to appropriate faculty and staff to enable them to continually enhance the quality of their services.

6. Have your programs certified.

There are five professional associations in the field offering certification for developmental programs and support services. These include the Association for the Tutoring Profession (ATP), the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA), the National Association for Developmental Education (NADE), the National College Learning Center Association (NCLCA), and the National Tutoring Association (NTA).

The certification process requires that those involved in administering programs take a careful look at what they are doing and compare this with professional standards in the field. It also familiarizes the faculty and staff of these programs with best practices and appropriate standards of performance. The process itself is valuable because it necessitates honest and thoughtful discussion of what faculty and staff members are doing, why they are doing it, and how well it works. Obtaining certification is also a reward and recognition for those involved in teaching courses or providing services. Furthermore, several of the certification programs also provide guidelines that can be used to develop and implement training programs for faculty and staff.

Have your courses or programs obtained any of the following certifications?

- Instructional program certification - NADE

- Learning Center Certification - NCLCA
- Mentor certification - CRLA
- Supplemental instruction program certification - NADE
- Tutor training certification - CRLA
- Tutoring program certification - NADE, ATP

A list of the web sites for these associations and certification programs is included in Appendix 1.

5. Provide comprehensive support services for developmental students.

The more comprehensive student support services are, the more likely they will contribute to student success. Although community colleges may not be able to provide a complete range of support services, they should strive to provide as many as possible for developmental students. The support services that have proven most beneficial to developmental students include tutoring, assessment, academic advising, mentoring, student success courses, first-year experience programs, and comprehensive learning assistance programs.

There should be adequate group and individual tutoring available for students from well-trained tutors in all developmental education subject areas. Academic advising must include both initial placement advising and regular follow-up mentoring for developmental students.

All developmental students should have the opportunity to participate in student success courses. Frequently, such courses are integrated into first-year experience programs. First-year experience courses should be designed to orient developmental students to the behaviors, expectations, and rewards of academe as well as matriculation management tasks such as scheduling, applying for student financial assistance, and negotiating with instructors.

Many of these support services, along with such activities as make-up testing, individualized instruction, and diagnostic testing can be provided through a comprehensive learning assistance program. This coordinates as many services as possible under a single administrative unit. In addition, these services should be well-integrated into the campus-wide developmental education effort. The integration of services into the campus-wide developmental education effort involves:

- consistent communication between developmental instructors and academic support personnel,
- regular collaboration between developmental instructors and academic support personnel, and
- consistent messages to students from instructors and academic support personnel about rules and expectations.

4. Encourage faculty to use active learning techniques.

Perhaps one of the most important components of successful developmental instruction is what takes place in the classroom with individual instructors and groups of students. Good developmental instruction contributes to positive results. One of the hallmarks of good developmental instruction is the use of active learning techniques.

Active learning techniques refer to a range of activities designed to get students actively involved in the subject matter by thinking about it, asking questions about it, talking about it, analyzing it, and applying it. Active learning techniques can be as simple as asking students to complete one minute papers at the end of each class stating what they have learned and what is still confusing. Or, they can be as complicated as having students work together in groups to develop solutions to problems relevant to the course material.

There is nothing wrong with delivering lectures to students, particularly if instructors are good lecturers. Ideally, however, classroom activities should include some combination of lecture and active learning. Unfortunately, most college professors teach as they were taught and, as a result, they spend the majority of their instructional time lecturing. Today's community college students tend to learn better if they are also able to participate in activities that get them involved in the subject matter instead of just hearing about it from the instructor.

The main reason why community college faculty rely on the lecture technique is that it is the only one they know. Consequently, it is essential to train faculty in active learning techniques and how to apply them.

Typical active learning techniques include the following.

- Paired student to student discussions of course concepts,
- Small group problem solving,

- Manipulative utilization in mathematics courses,
- Student generation of test questions,
- Peer coaching,
- Jigsaw techniques,
- Classroom assessment techniques,
- Student development of Powerpoint presentations illustrating course concepts, and
- Concept mapping.

A list of books, articles, and other resources on active learning is provided in Appendix 2.

3. Establish developmental education learning communities.

Today's community college students are socially engaged and they seek community with others. And, as always, peer pressure is an important determinant of student behavior. Learning communities can provide peer support and are also an excellent method of promoting appropriate academic behaviors and attitudes among students.

The simplest form of a developmental education learning community is paired courses where a cohort of students takes two different courses, one designed to support the other. Typical paired course combinations include a reading course or study strategies course paired with a social science or mathematics course, or a reading course paired with an English course. In such courses the content of one course is used as a focus for the reading or study strategies course.

The most complex form of a developmental education learning community involves a cohort of students taking an entire battery of courses together. Usually, these courses deal with common themes and the instructors meet regularly and design activities to be mutually supportive of these themes. These courses are supported by their own mentors and tutors, and enhanced by social and recreational activities for members of the learning community.

Designing and implementing learning communities is a complex and labor intensive process. Faculty involved in learning communities must design their courses carefully so that their content is mutually supportive. Faculty and students alike must learn to function in learning

communities. The scheduling of learning communities can represent a problem that must be addressed through cooperation among advisors, registration officials, and faculty. Furthermore, learning communities must be integrated into the overall developmental education effort and carefully coordinated to insure that this integration takes place.

Appendix 3 provides a variety of resources that may be used to develop and implement learning communities as well as to train faculty in how to insure that learning communities are successful.

2. Give faculty formative evaluation information and ask them to use it.

Although a great deal of evaluation information is generated by community colleges, very little of it is typically shared with faculty and staff. Yet faculty and staff are the very individuals whose behaviors should be most informed by evaluation information. They are the ones who can make changes in their syllabi, revise their lesson plans, and utilize new instructional techniques.

Armed with information about how students fare in developmental courses, those teaching the courses will know the outcomes of their efforts and be able to determine if they are satisfied with these outcomes. They can then decide if improvement is needed and, if so, consider ways to strengthen developmental education outcomes.

The evaluation information most typically provided to faculty and staff for formative evaluation purposes includes the following:

- percentage completion rates in developmental courses,
- percentage pass rates in developmental courses (percentage of A, B, and C grades),
- percentage of students who pass the first college level course after passing the highest level developmental course in that or a related subject area,
- percentage of students who participated in tutoring and earned a passing (A, B, or C) grade in the course for which they were tutored, and
- responses to student questionnaires evaluating their experience in support services.

This information should be reviewed at the end of each academic year by faculty and staff. This will enable them to plan revisions in courses and services for the following academic year.

1. Train adjunct faculty.

Most community colleges use large numbers of adjunct faculty to teach developmental courses. According to a 2007 study by the National Center for Developmental Education, only 21% of developmental courses are taught by full-time faculty (Gerlaugh, Thompson, Boylan, & Davis, 2007). Furthermore, it is unlikely that community colleges will be able to reduce their reliance on adjuncts to teach developmental courses at any point in the near future.

Because community colleges will continue to have to use adjunct faculty to teach developmental courses, it is essential that these faculty be trained in how to teach their subject matter to underprepared students. Enhancing the training of adjunct faculty who teach developmental courses is, perhaps, the single most cost effective action administrators can take to improve student performance in developmental education.

Although faculty training is essential to improve the quality of developmental education, such training must be ongoing if it is to have an impact. The “one shot” training activity is unlikely to be effective - it must be part of a long range training plan.

Adjunct faculty training is facilitated when incentives are provided to participate in this training. Such incentives need not necessarily be monetary. Nonmonetary incentives include such things as allowing faculty who participate in training to have their choice of courses and times to teach, providing food at training events, allocating parking space to trained adjuncts, holding drawings for prizes such as computers, offering gasoline coupons, or providing food charge cards at the college cafeteria.

Training may be accomplished in a variety of ways. Those used most often in community colleges include the following:

- hire outside experts to run workshops on teaching techniques for developmental students,
- identify on-campus experts to lead training activities for adjunct faculty,

- establish training institutes on campus using local and/or outside expertise to run training sessions for adjunct as well as full-time faculty,
- set up reading and discussion groups using books and articles on effective instructional strategies,
- identify graduate courses at local universities that faculty can take to improve their teaching. Offer incentives to enroll for these courses,
- provide mentoring to adjuncts from experienced developmental education faculty,
- send adjunct faculty to national or local developmental education conferences.² When they return, ask them to brief other faculty on what they have learned, and
- provide articles on instructional strategies for developmental students in adjunct faculty handbooks.

Conclusion

The previous ten practices are those most likely to improve developmental education. Some faculty and administrators may resist using these practices for any number of reasons. The bottom line, however, is that we know these practices work to improve the performance of underprepared students. If we know this to be true, why are we doing something else?

Questions to Assess the Quality of Your

² Every state and region in the U.S. has chapters of national professional associations in developmental education and learning assistance. These chapters provide annual conferences that may be attended by adjunct faculty at a low cost.

Developmental Courses and Services

1. Is there is a clear statement of goals and objectives for developmental education?
2. Is there a clear statement of the campus philosophy for developmental education?
3. Is there a single administrator responsible for ALL campus courses and services related to developmental education?
4. Does this administrator report directly to the Dean of Instruction or Vice President for Academic Affairs?
5. Do those teaching developmental courses and providing support services or their representatives meet on a regular basis (least twice a semester) to discuss problems and issues in developmental education?
6. Have your courses, programs, faculty or staff obtained certification from any of the following professional associations:
 - Association for the Tutoring Profession,
 - College Reading and Learning Association,
 - National Association for Developmental Education,
 - National College Learning Center Association, or the
 - National Tutoring Association?
7. Do your support services personnel use the Council for the Advancement of Standards statement of Standards for Learning Assistance Programs to guide the design and implementation of their activities?
8. Does your campus provide the following support services?
 - Individual tutoring in developmental education subject areas
 - Required assessment of students' cognitive skills
 - Required assessment of students non-cognitive characteristics
 - Initial academic advising
 - Ongoing academic advising
 - Group tutoring
 - Student mentoring
 - Student success courses
 - First year experience programs
9. Are your support services coordinated under a single administrative unit to form a comprehensive learning assistance program?

10. Are the following techniques used regularly by instructors of developmental courses?
- Paired student to student discussions of course concepts
 - Small group problem solving
 - Manipulative utilization in mathematics courses
 - Student generation of test questions
 - Peer coaching
 - Jigsaw techniques
 - Classroom assessment techniques
 - Student development of Powerpoint presentations illustrating course concepts
 - Concept mapping
11. Are paired courses provided for developmental students?
12. Are learning communities provided for developmental students?
13. Which of the following data is provided to faculty and staff for formative purposes?
- Percentage completion rates for developmental courses.
 - Percentage pass rates for developmental courses.
 - Percentage of students who pass the first college level course followed by passing the highest level developmental course in that or a related subject area.
 - Percentage of students who participated in tutoring and earned a passing (A, B, or C) grade in the course for which they were tutored.
 - Responses to student questionnaires evaluating their experience in support services.
14. Is developmental education included in the college's long range planning?
15. Are the needs of developmental education taken into account in the resource allocation process?
16. Are students required to continually enroll in developmental courses until their developmental requirements are completed or until they have otherwise demonstrated mastery of the subject matter?
17. Are students required to take the next level developmental course or the first level college course as soon as they have completed the previous developmental education course?

18. Are faculty trained the use of instructional techniques such as active learning that will make developmental courses more interesting and meaningful to students?
19. Do faculty make efforts to ensure that the exit standards for each level of developmental courses are consistent with the next level developmental or college level courses?
20. Are adjunct faculty required to participate in training on how to teach developmental students?
21. Is this training ongoing throughout the year?
22. Are incentives provided for adjunct faculty to participate in training?
23. Are books and articles on teaching developmental students provided to adjunct faculty teaching developmental courses?
24. Are adjunct faculty encouraged and supported for attending local, regional, and national conferences on developmental education?
25. Are adjunct faculty provided with mentors to provide advice and encouragement in teaching developmental students?

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