UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF GEORGIA: TRANSFORMING REMEDIATION IN ENGLISH AND READING JULY 2013

How to dramatically increase success rates in gateway courses without compromising the integrity of the content

The University System of Georgia English and Reading Implementation Team: Report and Recommendations

Introduction

In April 2013, the University System of Georgia (USG) established a System-wide Implementation Team to Transform Remediation in Learning Support English and Reading. The team was charged with determining how the System's colleges could dramatically improve success rates in gateway courses without compromising the disciplinary integrity of these courses. The task force was charged with developing its recommendations by July 31, 2013.

Five distinguished Georgia leaders served as members of the team. (See Appendix for membership.) The work was carried out under the leadership of Teresa Betkowski, Interim Assistant Vice Chancellor for Transitional and General Education, and Virginia Michelich, Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Achievement.

Background

Complete College Georgia, Georgia's Higher Education Completion Plan 2012[1] presents a compelling vision and strategy for developing a state workforce that will ensure a prosperous future for Georgia residents. Among its key planks is the commitment to increase the proportion of young adults with postsecondary degrees and certificates from 42 percent to 60 percent by 2020. Achieving this commitment will require fundamental changes in the ways in which higher education supports its students in completing key gateway course sequences.

[1] Retrieved from http://www.usg.edu/educational_access/documents/GaHigherEducationCompletionPlan2012.pdf.

Currently, approximately 1 in 5 of all students in the University System of Georgia colleges and approximately 2 in 5 of all students in the System's access colleges begin their studies in remedial (learning support) classes, which neither award college credit nor require mastery of college-level course content.[2] Less than one-sixth of these students complete a degree within six years.[3] However, it is not only in learning support courses that students flounder. Failure rates (D, F, W) in English Composition 1 and Political Science typically are near 25 percent.[4] Thus, the improvement of lower division courses and instruction, and the establishment of suitable, focused student support mechanisms must be a priority for the University System of Georgia.

Recommendations

The following recommendations reflect the consensus of the Implementation Team for highest priority action. These recommendations are intended to apply to all campuses in the University System of Georgia. The team believes strongly that pilot projects, which typically affect small numbers of students on individual campuses and small numbers of campuses within the System, cannot bring about the outcomes of Georgia's Higher Education Completion Plan. It is time to innovate at scale, and the **Implementation Team Recommendations** are offered as a blueprint for this innovation. We therefore recommend the following System policies and College practices:

1. Focus on supporting success in college credit-bearing, gateway courses for *all* students.
2. Enroll most students needing support in gateway courses and implement a co-requisite approach to support student success.
3. Use multiple measures to place students in gateway courses and appropriate supports.
4. Create a combined reading/writing course.

[2] Source: The University System of Georgia Research and Policy Analysis.
[3] Source: The University System of Georgia Research and Policy Analysis.
[4] Source: The University System of Georgia Research and Policy Analysis.

5. Terminate use of COMPASS as an exit examination.
6. Align with the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS).
7. Develop advising systems and protocols for placing students in gateway courses and support advisors in transition to new models.

Recommendation 1: Focus on supporting success in college credit-bearing, gateway courses for all students.

Students attend college to learn college-level material. The focus of lower division education should be on enabling students to master the material in gateway courses. Learning support and remediation strategies should be designed to further this aim, not to reteach high school material unless essential to college course success. In brief, learning support should be a vehicle to support learning of college-level material, not an end in itself.

We recommend that many more students be advised to begin their programs of study in college-level, credit-bearing gateway courses. Well-prepared students should begin their study in gateway courses. Underprepared students should also study college-level material with integrated, just-in-time support either in a single semester or over one year (see Recommendations 2).

Recommendation 2: Enroll most students needing support in gateway courses and implement a co-requisite approach to support student success.

The traditional approach to learning support in the University System of Georgia colleges has been to enroll underprepared students in special non-credit courses, which were designed to allow them to learn, or most often relearn, key prerequisites for college-level introductory courses. These learning support classes in reading and English include a wide variety of topics typically taught in middle school and high school, are not specifically targeted to the learning needs of individual students, and are not tied to the content of the college-level class.

As documented in *Complete College Georgia, Georgia's Higher Education Completion Plan 2012*, the traditional approach to learning support has not led to

degree or certificate attainment by the great majority of students it was designed to help.[5] It is time to rethink the support systems for student success in gateway courses without reducing our System's commitment to success for all students.

The task force recommends that a new set of co-requisite support courses and course support structures be developed System-wide. The central idea is to provide students in standard gateway college-credit courses with more learning time and intensive instruction explicitly designed to support mastery of college material as the need arises—in essence, just-in-time support.

There are several models of co-requisite support, which include one- to two-credit linked learning labs that show special promise for emulation and refinement in the University System of Georgia. The common features of co-requisite models are: (1) whatever the co-requisite format, students will complete a gateway college-credit course in one semester, saving students time and money while increasing their likelihood of success; and (2) the content of the co-requisite support is integrated with the college content of the gateway college-credit course. In other words, students will start their college experience learning college-level material, although perhaps with very different levels of support.

Experience with co-requisite approaches at other postsecondary systems and campuses suggests that many students with only moderate academic deficiencies can succeed in gateway courses if they are enrolled in a linked lab that enables them to master the key course content without falling behind. Important examples include efforts at Austin Peay State University, the Community College of Baltimore County, the University of Maryland, the University of Texas, and the University of Michigan, which have all demonstrated impressive gains in student achievement with a linked lab approach.

The Implementation Team recognizes that new strategies will need to be developed to support the co-requisite approach. The University System Office should collaborate with members of the Implementation Team to seek

[5] See Complete College America (2011, September). *Time is the enemy.* Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.completecollege.org/resources_and_reports/time_is_the_enemy.

endorsement of the co-requisite strategy from the Academic Committee on English (ACE). This strategy will allow students to successfully complete a gateway college-credit course in one semester. An ad hoc committee of the ACE should be charged with developing a framework and set of guiding principles for USG co-requisite courses and support structures. System colleges should be supported in developing co-requisite courses and supports that reflect the needs of their campus populations and reflect the design principles set forth by the ACE.

Recommendation 3: Use multiple measures to place students in gateway courses and appropriate supports.

Extensive data collected on student success rates in English Composition suggest that high school grade point average (HSGPA), in combination with test scores, provides a better predictor of student success than test scores alone. For example, a student with a COMPASS score of 62 has a probability of success in English Composition 1 that varies from 44 percent for a student with a 2.0 high school GPA to 75 percent for a student with a 3.5 high school GPA.[6] Currently, high school GPA is not used in placing students.

The implementation team recommends that the University System develop a uniform placement index based on a student's probability of success in a gateway course. The index should take into account both test scores (SAT/ACT or COMPASS) and high school GPA. The choice of index and the cut-offs used for placement will need to be informed by System data analysis and in consultation with stakeholders in other disciplines. Key concerns for a committee of experts to address include:

- Establishing system-level cutoff ranges for gateway, co-requisite, and year-long strategies based on the probability of success in a gateway course.
- Identifying a timeline for regular review and revision of system cutoffs.
- Determining whether probability of success should be based on data from the entire system, a sector of the system, or an individual college.

[6] Source: The University System of Georgia Research and Policy Analysis.

- Determining whether very low success rates at a particular institution should trigger a review of institutional support systems.
- Developing a policy on which tests should be used for placement and whether students should be required to submit SAT or ACT scores for placement purposes.

The team recognizes that measures appropriate for recent high school graduates might not be appropriate for non-traditional students. For non-traditional students, in order to ensure that the placement index reflects current information, it might be appropriate to give relatively greater weight to a recent placement test and less weight to high school GPA.

Recommendation 4: Create a combined reading/writing course.

While low to moderate need students will benefit from the co-requisite strategy, significantly underprepared students or non-traditional students may need a more comprehensive support model. System enrollment data from Fall 2010 to Fall 2012 confirms that students needing learning support reading dropped almost 70% and those needing learning support English dropped almost 58%.[7] With these declining numbers and since reading and writing are skills developed simultaneously, a combined course particularly one with online enhancements needs to be considered. Combined developmental reading and writing courses have been described in the literature for decades, going back to the seminal work of David Bartholomae at the University of Pittsburgh.[8]

The team has begun the development of a "Foundations for College English" to replace the current learning support reading and writing courses. ACE should collaborate with members of the Implementation Team in making recommendations for this course for students who are admitted to System colleges with substantial deficiencies to successfully complete a gateway college-credit course in one semester.

[7] Retrieved from http://www.usg.edu/research/student_data/semester_enrollment_reports
[8] Bartholomae, D. & Petrosky, A. (1986). *Facts, artifacts and counterfacts*. Upper Mountclair, NY: Boynton Cook.

Recommendation 5: Terminate use of COMPASS as an exit examination.

The task force strongly recommends the elimination of the COMPASS as an exit exam for underprepared students who need additional support.

As we shift our focus on learning support towards completion of the college-level gateway courses, the COMPASS exit exam creates an unnecessary hurdle to college completion for students who have already demonstrated proficiency by passing the "Foundations for College English" course. Learning support must not be a barrier locking students out of gateway material; it must be an integrated support system for helping students develop the skills they need to be successful in gateway courses.

Recommendation 6: Align to the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS).

At present, the ACE-approved learning outcomes for English Composition delineate student learning outcomes in terms of content knowledge. Revision of the current learning outcomes for gateway courses would send a powerful signal to K−12 about the importance of the Common Core curriculum to college readiness. Explicit alignment of the expectations of USG gateway courses with the secondary performance standards will facilitate a smoother transition for students from high school to college. Such alignment would also promote student understanding and success at the college level.

Recommendation 7: Develop advising systems and protocols for placing students in gateway courses and support advisors in transition to new models.

Transitioning to the new system of gateway courses and course support systems demands significant change in long-established traditions of college advising by both faculty and professional staff. At the most basic level, faculty members, professional advisors, and administrators responsible for course planning and scheduling will need to understand new system guidelines and the rationale for them. Advisors will need tools and knowledge to: (1) support students in the selection of appropriate courses for their desired programs of study; (2) match

student needs to new support structures including co-requisite and combined reading/writing models; and (3) understand a new placement index based on multiple measures that predict the probability of student success in gateway courses. Without intensive support for advisors, the dramatic improvements in student success, which we seek through these recommendations, will not be realized.

Infrastructure for Implementation of Recommendations

The Implementation Team recommends the development of an infrastructure to implement its recommendations.

- The USG Office of Educational Access and Success, with advice from the ACE Executive Committee, should be tasked with forming an Ad Hoc Steering Committee of English faculty to direct the implementation of the recommendations. Financial support must be provided to support the intensive work of the steering committee.
- The Implementation Team recommendations should be a top priority of the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor and Chief Academic Officer, with dedicated time secured from staff of the Office of Educational Access and Success and the Office of Research and Policy Analysis.
- The Office of Research and Policy Analysis should continue to develop a longstanding relationship with the ACE and individual English department heads so that System leaders have current and relevant data for monitoring and recognizing successes and problem areas as they arise.

Steps for Specific Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Focus on supporting success in college credit-bearing, gateway courses for all students.
Recommendation 2: Enroll most students needing support in gateway courses and implement a co-requisite approach to support student success.
The University System of Georgia will seek ACE endorsement of the co-requisite strategy.
An ACE Ad Hoc Steering Committee will begin working immediately to: (1) Review co-requisite models in Georgia and in other states to identify a small number of recommended models, including information about the number and type of credits offered, staffing, student population, and financing. (2) Build co-requisite curricular materials to provide just-in-time support to students. (3) Identify common course numbers for support courses/lab components. (4) Develop resources for advisors for placing students in co-requisite support models.
Recommendation 3: Use multiple measures to place students in gateway courses and appropriate supports.
The USG will create a committee with representation from the Implementation Team, Learning Support Directors, and University System office to: (1) Establish System-wide cut-off ranges for gateway and co-requisite models based on data provided by the USG Office of Research Policy Analysis. (2) Develop a uniform placement index based on standardized test scores and high school grade point average (HSGPA).
Recommendation 4: Create a combined reading/writing course.
The Implementation Team will begin to develop a combined reading/writing course for students requiring additional support based on their placement index.
The "Foundations for College English" will replace the current learning support reading and writing courses.
Recommendation 5: Terminate use of COMPASS as an exit examination.
The University System office will terminate the use of COMPASS for the purposes of exit.
Recommendation 6: Align to the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS).
The ACE ad hoc committee will review current course content and encourage greater collaboration between K-12 and Higher Education.
The University System office will provide grant opportunities to support colleges in pilot efforts to incorporate the Common Core Georgia performance standards in college-level courses.
Recommendation 7: Develop advising systems and protocols for placing students in gateway courses and support advisors in transition to new models.

The University System office will establish an Administrative Committee for Advisors with a point of contact on every campus that will: (1) Lead institutions in ensuring that System-wide recommendations for changes in remediation are communicated to all advisors at their institutions. (2) Develop strategies for enabling students to choose as early as possible a coherent program of study and for enrolling them in the relevant gateway course. (3) Support the use of "Degree Works" in directing students to the correct pathway for their majors. (4) Communicate the role that "GAtracs" can play in the advisement of transfer students.
The University System office should provide extensive regional direct training workshops for all advisors that enable them to properly and efficiently guide students in the selection of gateway mathematics courses relevant to the students' programs of study.

Appendix

Membership

The Implementation Team consists of five experts in the field of English. The team was supported by staff from the University System of Georgia.

Task Force

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