Increasing Success by Creating Opportunities for Students with Reading Deficiencies

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Abstract

The difference between college ready and remedial reading students were looked at in the areas of first term GPA, first term pass rate, first term retention rate, first term success rate, persistence to spring, and persistence to next fall. Students in the remedial group had lower GPA’s were less likely to be successful, and less likely to persist with their education. Many students in need of remedial courses do not take recommended placement courses for a variety of reasons, one of the main reasons is they are allowed to take college levels courses and placement is not mandatory. Alternatives to current placement, the remedial course structure, and advisement for those placed in remedial education were investigated and recommended.
Increasing Success by Creating Opportunities for Students with Reading Deficiencies

One of the most profound aspects of Community Colleges that has stood the test of time is the open door admission policy. To offer an education to students that would not normally be offered the opportunity because of measures (socio-economic status, previous education) out of their control is part of the American Dream (Montgomery County Community College). This policy allows all high school graduates or equivalent the opportunity to enter higher education and begin the path that will lead them to success. As well as offering great opportunities to students, it offers challenges to educators to meet the needs of underprepared students.

Throughout this study, we will review Des Moines Area Community College data, investigate programs, and make recommendations that are designed to “Increase Success by Creating Opportunities for Students with Reading Deficiencies.”

When students begin the enrollment process at most community colleges, they are required to take an assessment or placement test in math, English, and reading. As a result of those tests, they are considered either “college ready” and can enroll in college level courses or “Remedial” and need to take a variety of courses in order to become “college ready” (Bailey & Cho, 2010, p. 46). At most institutions, a variety of remedial services are available: however, most offer semester long courses, and in reading alone it can take as much as two semesters to become college ready. Attending to the needs of remedial students is one of the most problematic and critical problems currently facing community colleges (Bailey & Cho, 2010, p. 46).

According to ACT (2005), approximately 11% of those entering higher education are enrolled in remedial reading and 70% of those do not earn a college degree or certificate within eight years of enrollment (para. 6).
This study will complete a data review of first-time, full-time and part-time students entering Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC) during the fall semesters of 2013, 2014, and 2015. A comparison of college ready and remedial students by gender, age group, and race will be reviewed. Within these group first-term GPA, first-term pass rate, first-term retention rate, first-term success rate, persistence to spring, and persistence to next fall will be examined to determine college wide reading remediation needs.

Assessment (placement) scores provide information about student skills in math, English, and reading to student development professionals at Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC) and assist in academic planning. According to DMACC ES 4200, General Assessment Requirements (2015):

DMACC requires a skills assessment of all new, full-time students. Full-time students are defined as those taking 12 credit hours or more during fall and spring semesters and 8 credit hours or more during the summer semester. All pre-high school, high school, home school and guest students must meet the college assessment requirements as stated in ES 4100 (para. 1).

Assessment scores are valid for five years from the test date and three options are available to satisfy admission requirements. Students may complete the Compass Computerized Adaptive Placement Assessment and Support System (COMPASS) for reading and English placement tests and Assessment and Learning in Knowledge Spaces (ALEKS) math assessment online testing which has mandatory placement requirements. ACT scores may be submitted to the Admissions office for reading and English and ALEKS scores for math placement. Students having earned previous college credit may submit official transcripts of previous college coursework for evaluation. Assessment requirements may be waived for grades earned of a C or
higher in college level reading, English, and math courses. Due to the discontinuation of ACT COMPASS products, the College will implement the use of College Board ACCUPLACER assessment in fall 2016.

Based on current DMACC placement guidelines, college reading readiness is determined by students obtaining a reading score of 19 or higher on the ACT or 81 or above on the COMPASS. There are three developmental reading courses for students to take to improve their reading skills: RDG 038: College Preparatory Reading I, RDG 039: College Preparatory Reading II, and RDG 049: College Reading II. Speed Reading: RDG 163 is an advanced course offered for students at college level reading to increase reading speed and comprehension. Placement in these courses is encouraged by academic advising staff and not mandatory for reading and English at DMACC. College credit is earned for all four reading courses, but cannot be used to fulfill degree requirements except for RDG 163: Speed Reading.

College Preparatory Reading I: RDG 038 is the first course in the developmental reading series of two courses. The course focuses on improving basic reading comprehension and helps students to succeed on reading assignments. The second course in the series, RDG 039: College Preparatory Reading II, builds on the material in the first course and focuses on increasing vocabulary and comprehension skills. According to Dan Nelson (personal communication, May, 3, 2016), Academic Achievement Center Instructor; RDG 049: College Reading II was developed most recently and allows students to take it concurrently with a college level course. Students explore reading strategies and develop study skills to tackle their college level course textbooks and course materials. He reported that this course can increase student success in both RDG 039 and the college level course. It requires students to invest a significant amount of time and energy to improve their reading skills through the use of various techniques including
sustained silent reading. A small number of sections are offered each academic year at the Ankeny Campus. Instructor Nelson discussed how increased marketing efforts for the course will help build course awareness with academic advisors and students, leading to expanded course offering and increased enrollment each semester (Nelson, personal communication, May 3, 2016).

Academic advisors at DMACC wear many hats and provide students assistance with academic planning, degree audits, registration, institutional policies, and assist with academic improvement plans and satisfactory academic progress appeal processes. Academic advisors review test scores and make recommendations regarding appropriate course placement based on test scores during advising sessions. When students earn assessment scores below college readiness levels it is often challenging to convince them to take development college preparatory courses that are costly and cannot be counted towards degree requirements. Without mandatory placement, academic advisors can only strongly recommend that students take developmental college preparatory courses and document the conversation in the student information system.

New students interact with academic advisors during orientation and are assisted with registering for classes and academic planning. During orientation, new students are informed about academic advising, counseling, and other resources available to help improve success. Many programs at DMACC require students to take SDV 108: College Experience. Students are required to meet with an academic advisor to complete a completion plan assignment as part of course requirements. After these initial interactions, students are not required to meet with an academic advisor unless if they are placed on academic conditional enrollment or academic disqualification. These students are not meeting minimum satisfactory academic progress standards of a 2.0 grade point average (GPA) and 67% completion rate based on the DMACC ES
Satisfactory Academic Progress policy (2011). Students placed on academic conditional enrollment have a hold placed on their record that prevents registration and until students meet with an academic advisor and complete an academic improvement plan (AIP). Students that are academically disqualified also have a hold placed on their record to prevent registration and are required to sit out a fall or spring term prior to requesting re-enrollment. They also must meet with an academic advisor to complete an AIP as part of the re-enrollment process.

There are a large number of students that self-advice and do not access academic advising services due to a number of factors. Because of the large number of students requiring advisement compared with a small number of advisors, mandatory advising policies are difficult to implement. This creates additional challenges along with a lack of mandatory placement for reading and English. According to the guidelines listed for student success in the Access, Success, and Completion monograph, “Key intake programs including orientation, assessment, advisement, and placement will be integrated and mandatory for students” (O’Banion, 2013, p. 19). After a thorough article and data review the following statements have been postulated:

1. Multiple measures should be used for placement into developmental reading and placement should be mandatory in order to meet the needs of all populations. Placement standards should be revised to ensure remedial courses are only required for those who need it.

2. Developmental reading curriculum should be revised to incorporate best practices, such as accelerated learning programs and learning communities.

3. Advising should be mandatory for students requiring developmental education in reading with the goal of early intervention, connections to resources, academic planning and ultimately student success.
Method

Participants

There were a total 6,681 student records reviewed, 3,783 were considered college ready based on ACT concordance scores and 2,898 required remediation. This group included 3,371 female, and 3,295 male students, all were first-time, full-time and part-time students entering DMACC during the fall of 2013, 2014, and 2015.

Materials

The data used in this study was extracted from Banner by Ellucian student information system and SAS 9.4 visual analytics “Explorer” which was used to review data and create tables. A variety of groups were created including “Remediation” (college ready, ACT score 19 and above, remedial, ACT score 18 and below), “Age Group”, “Gender”, and “ethnicity” (3 main groups included, white non-Hispanic, black, non-Hispanic, and Hispanic). Many variables in each group were explored including: first-term GPA, first-term pass rate (C- or higher), first-term retention rate (completed the first term), first-term success rate (C- or higher), persistence to spring (began the spring semester), persistence to next fall (started classes the following fall), and the number of developmental courses passed (RDG 038, 039, 049) and GPA since first-term (their GPA in following developmental courses).
Results

The total number of students in this study was 6,681. The first-term GPA in this cohort was 2.40, the first-term pass rate was 70%, first-term retention rate was 83%, with a first-term success rate of 63%, the persistence rate to spring was 72%, the persistence rate to fall was 52%, and the number of developmental courses taken and passed was 336.

Based on ACT or concordance scores there were 3,783 (57%) considered college ready. The first term GPA was 2.58, the first term pass rate was 74%, the first term retention rate was 85%, the first term success rate was 68%, the persistence to spring was 75% and the persistence to the fall was 52%. There were 2,898 (43%) requiring remedial education, the first term GPA was 2.15, the first term pass rate was 65%, the first term retention rate was 80%, the first term success rate was 57%, the persistence to spring was 68%, the persistence to fall was 48%, and the number of remedial courses taken was 310.

Figure 1: Total number of student records, 2013, 2014, 2015

<table>
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<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Frequency (Percent of Total)</th>
<th>first_term_gpa</th>
<th>first_term_pass_rate</th>
<th>first_term_retention_rate</th>
<th>first_term_success_rate</th>
<th>persist_to_spring</th>
<th>persist_to_next_fall</th>
<th>dev_courses_passed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6,681</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>336</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: College Ready and Remedial Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Remediation</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Frequency (Percent of Total)</th>
<th>first_term_gpa</th>
<th>first_term_pass_rate</th>
<th>first_term_retention_rate</th>
<th>first_term_success_rate</th>
<th>persist_to_spring</th>
<th>persist_to_next_fall</th>
<th>dev_courses_passed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College Ready</td>
<td>3,783</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remedial</td>
<td>2,898</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>310</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were 1,884 (28%) female students that were determined college ready, their first term GPA was 2.73, the first term pass rate was 77%, the first term retention rate was 87%, first term success rate was 72%, the persistence to spring was 77%, and the persistence to next fall was 56%. There were 1,934 (29%) male college ready students, the first term GPA was 2.44,
first term pass rate was 71%, first term retention rate was 84%, first term success rate was 64%, the persistence to spring was 74%, and persistence to next fall was 52%. The number of female student requiring remedial or developmental course work was 1,527 (23%), their first term GPA was 2.24, the first term pass rate was 67%, first term retention rate was 81%, first term success rate was 59%, persistence to spring was 69%, persistence to next fall was 49%, and the number of developmental courses passed was 215. The number of male students requiring remedial education was 1,361 (20%) their first term GPA was 2.05, the first term pass rate was 63%, first term retention rate was 79%, first term success rate was 55%, persistence to spring was 68%, persistence to next fall was 47%, and the number of developmental courses passed was 95.

**Figure 3: Remediation and Gender by First Term GPA, First Term Pass Rate, First Term Retention Rate, First Term Success Rate, and Persistence to next Fall and Next Spring**

The majority of the students entering DMACC for the first time in the fall of 2013, 2014, and 2015 ranged in the ages of 18-22 (2,188) or 33% for college ready students, their first term GPA was 2.34, the first term pass rate was 71%, first term retention rate was 84%, first term success rate or 64%, persistence to spring was 78% and the persistence to fall was 54%. For the 18-22 group (1,779) or 27% required remedial education, the first term GPA was 2.01, the first term pass rate was 64%, first term retention rate was 81%, first term success rate was 55%, persistence to spring was 72% and the persistence to next fall was 48%. There were 716, (11%) 17 and below in the college ready group and 513, (8%) 17 and below in the remedial group.
Figure 4: Remediation and Age group by First Term GPA, First Term Pass Rate, First Term Retention Rate, First Term Success Rate, and Persistence to Next Fall and Spring

The 3 largest ethnic groups in this study were white non-Hispanic with 3,112 (47%) in the college ready group, their first term GPA was 2.65, the first term pass rate was 76%, first term retention rate was 87%, first term success rate was 70%, persistence to spring was 77%, and the persistence to next fall was 55%. There were 2,035 (30%) in the remedial group, the first term GPA was 2.28, the first term pass rate was 70%, first term retention rate was 83%, first term success rate was 62%, persistence to spring was 71%, and the persistence to next fall was 52%.

The black non-Hispanic group was next with 215 (3%) in the college ready group, their first term GPA was 1.82, the first term pass rate was 51%, first term retention rate was 72%, first term success rate was 47%, the persistence to spring was 58%, and the persistence to next fall was 35%. A total of 423 (6%) students were in the remedial group, their first term GPA was 1.46, the first term pass rate was 42% first term retention rate was 64%, first term success rate was 34%, persistence to spring was 53%, and the persistence to next fall was 30%. The next largest population was the Hispanic group with 187 (3%) in the college ready group, their first term GPA was 2.33, the first term pass rate was 70%, first term retention rate was 86%. First term success rate was 62%, the persistence to spring was 70%, and the persistence to next fall was
51%. There were 224 (3%) students in the remedial group, their first term GPA was 2.11, the first term pass rate was 65%, first term retention rate was 82%, first term success rate was 57%, the persistence to spring was 68% and the persistence to next fall was 44%.

Figure 5: Remediation and Race by First Term GPA, First Term Pass Rate, First Term Retention Rate, First Term Success Rate, Persistence to Next Fall and Spring
Discussion

In this study we had three different areas of investigation. The first hypothesis states that “Multiple measures should be used for placement into developmental reading and placement should be mandatory in order to meet the needs of all populations. Placement standards should be revised to ensure remedial courses are only required for those who need it.” According to Jillian Kenzie, Senior Scholar for the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA), the best way to improve graduation, retention, and persistence rates is to ensure student success (Kenzie, 2016). By confirming students are placed in courses where they have a better chance to be successful throughout their education, they are more likely to persist. Creating a multiple measure system leads to a more efficient placement method. At Davidson Country Community College (CCCSE, 2016) they recently implemented a multiple measure for placement process. This is a hierarchy of measures used to determine placement into college level courses. The first step is to review high school transcripts (not to exceed 5 years) for an overall GPA of 2.6. Next, if students do not meet the requirements for high school GPA, ACT scores will be evaluated. Students new to college may place into college-level courses if they have previous college credit indicating college level readiness. And finally, if students do not meet those requirements they will be required to take a placement test. According to CCCSE (2016) research, if placement testing remains the main placement factor one option designed to help students is to make the placement testing available or mandatory in the high school similar to the ACT or SAT test. The next opportunity for improvement with placement is to notify students in advance of their enrollment that testing is required and provide them with study material to prepare for the test (CCCSE, 2016). According to DMACC’s current placement policies 2,898 are in need of remediation; however, 2,605 did not take any remedial courses.
took and passed one course and 17 took and passed two remedial reading courses. This data indicates that for a variety of reasons students are not taking advantage of DMACC’s development reading program. One reason according to Kay McClenny (former Director of CCCSE) is “Student’s don’t do optional.” (Fain, 2012, para. 2). Another reason has to do with students wanting to get through their education with as few costs as possible. Developmental courses add to their expense and do not count towards degree requirements.

Our next hypothesis states “developmental reading curriculum should be revised to incorporate best practices such as accelerated learning programs and learning communities.” College developmental reading programs are moving away from the current format and towards a learner centered constructivist frame work (Laine, Laine, & Bullock, 2000, p. 2). This allows learners to build knowledge for themselves and create their own meaning with the focus being on the reader. Research indicates that the ideal learning environment for developmental college reading courses is collaborative. Kaiden (1998) reports that students need collaborative peer groups to discuss texts and to improve their understanding of materials.

In our review of developmental reading courses offered at DMACC, RDG 049: College Reading II is offered as an accelerated learning program. This course pairs developmental reading with a college level course. The textbook for the college level course is used as the primary course material. College Reading II (RDG 049) uses the workshop format along with sustained silent reading which has been proven an effective method to engage students in opportunities for contextual reading. This course has been offered since fall 2014 at the DMACC Ankeny Campus.

In the 2015-2016 academic year, two sections of the course were offered during fall 2015 with a total of thirteen students enrolled. One section was offered during spring 2016 with five
students enrolled. During the 2014-2015 academic year, three sections were offered in fall 2014 with forty-two students enrolled and one section was offered in spring 2015 with seven students enrolled.

According to Community College Research Center (CCRC) report, What We Know About Accelerated Developmental Education, many colleges have begun to address high rates of attrition by experimenting with accelerated models of developmental education which help student’s complete remediation in a much shorter timeframe so they can enroll more quickly in college-level courses (2014, p. 1). “Acceleration strategies are designed to minimize exit points and limit the time students spend in developmental education, reducing the likelihood that outside commitments or events will pull students away from college before they complete their developmental sequence” (2014, p.1). Based on our review of literature, this course should help students achieve academic success. Enrollment in RDG 049: College Reading II has been limited since the course was initially implemented in fall 2014 due to a lack of awareness and no mandatory placement policy.

During our review of learning communities offered at DMACC, we determined that a developmental learning community was offered at the DMACC Urban Campus during the 2015-2016 academic year. During fall 2015, RDG 038: College Preparatory Reading I and ENG 060: College Preparatory Writing I were paired with SDV 108: College Experience which is a one credit college course required for new students entering DMACC for most associate degree programs. Sixteen students enrolled in the fall 2015 learning community. During spring 2016, a developmental learning community was offered with the next courses in the developmental sequence which included RDG 039: College Preparatory Reading II and ENG 061: College
Preparatory Writing II paired with SDV 115: Study Strategies, a two credit college course which counts for elective credit. Fifteen students enrolled in the spring 2016 learning community.


*Learning communities are offered at many community colleges with the goal of improving student success. Students are co-enrolled into several classes together in a cohort model. Some learning communities include integrated curricula, collaboration among instructors, and student services enhanced advising and tutoring embedded into the courses. Developmental learning communities primarily serve academically underprepared first-time students. Researchers have shown that more comprehensive programs led to positive impacts on student engagement, college persistence, credits earned, and developmental course sequence completion (p. 50).*

The third hypothesis is advising should be mandatory for students requiring developmental education in reading with the goal of early intervention, connections to resources, academic planning and ultimately student success. According to the CCCSE 2016 National Report, *Expectations Meet Reality: The Underprepared Student and Community Colleges*, “advising must require students to work with an advisor during the first term of enrollment, continuously throughout their academic careers, be inescapable, and a part of coursework” (p. 20). Many programs require that new DMACC students take SDV 108: College Experience during their first semester of college. One of the major assignments in the course is the completion plan assignment where students map out a graduation plan during class with the assistance of an academic advisor as part of the assignment. The completion plan assignment encourages students to interact with academic advisors for academic planning purposes. We
know that students may complete their completion plan for one program and decide at a later date to change their program to another DMACC program. This may dramatically change their plan and without continuous academic advising, students may self-advice and select the wrong course sequencing. The results of the CCCSE 2016 National Report, *Expectations Meet Reality: The Underprepared Student and Community Colleges*, determined that “less than half of the students said an advisor helped them set academic goals” (p. 14). On one hand advising helps students placed into developmental reading, but too few students meet with an academic advisor on a regular basis due to DMACC’s environment where advising is not required mandatorily.

In Julia Panke Makela’s article *Advising Community College Students: Exploring Traditional and Emerging Theory*, “students with low college readiness benefit most from early, continuous access to advising services that simultaneously address academic, social, and personal readiness needs” (2008, p. 5). It is essential for underprepared students placed in developmental reading to have resources in place and utilize academic advising when additional assistance is needed during their academic journeys.

New DMACC students are required to maintain satisfactory academic progress beginning their first semester. When students are placed on academic warning after one semester of not maintaining the minimum standards, they should be required to meet with an advisor in order to address the causes leading to the academic difficulty and develop strategies for success. Under current DMACC procedures, students are not required to have an academic advisor intervention due to academic difficulty until two semesters of academic challenges have occurred and the student is placed on academic conditional enrollment. The evidence presented in our review of literature supports our hypothesis that advising for students placed into developmental education in reading should be mandatory and the key to student success is early intervention. O’Banion
(2013) stated, “Students will be carefully monitored throughout the college experience-especially in the first term-to ensure successful progress: the college will make interventions immediately to keep students on track” (p. 20).

Throughout the course of this project, we learned that there is not a one size fits all approach to improving student success through developmental education programs in reading. The 2014 CCRC research overview, *What We Know About Developmental Education Outcomes* states:

Research evidence suggests that, for the most part, the traditional system of developmental education is not achieving its intended purpose: to improve outcomes for underprepared students. These findings do not mean that developmental education should be discarded; large numbers of community college students need support to succeed academically. The findings do suggest, however, that the system could benefit from thoughtful reform” (p. 5).

The challenge is to increase academic advising interventions for students that enter DMACC with assessment scores below college readiness in reading and provide them accurate course placement, academic advising, and other supports. Evidence found in our research indicates that multiple measures should be utilized along with mandatory placement. Developmental reading courses should be revised to incorporate best practices including accelerated learning programs and learning communities. Mandatory advising should be implemented to increase student success for students with reading deficiencies.
References


Center for Community College Engagement (2016). Expectations meet reality: The underprepared student and community colleges. Austin, TX: The University of Austin, College of Educational Administration, Program in Higher Education Leadership.


