

Inver Hills Community College  
Developmental Education Task Force  
Recommendations

**Final Report**

**ASMUSSEN RESEARCH & CONSULTING LLC**

**May 19, 2014**

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An Independent Research Firm

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May 19, 2014

Dr. Christina Royal  
Provost & Vice President of Academic Affairs  
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2500 East 80<sup>th</sup> Street  
Inver Grove Heights, MN 55076

Dr. Royal:

I am pleased to forward these recommendations from the Inver Hills Developmental Education Task Force. You charged the task force with developing recommendations that would inform the college's Master Academic Plan on strategies for improving the effectiveness of developmental education.

The task force reviewed the literature and recent trends in developmental education. It deliberated alternative strategies and weighed possible recommendations during four meetings. As a result of those efforts, the task force developed a series of seven recommendations that it believes will greatly improve student success. This report elaborates on the recommendations and provides additional insights on their importance.

I sincerely appreciated the dedication, energy, and thoughtfulness of the task force members. Task force members are available to help transition its recommendations into the Master Academic Plan. Please let us know if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,



John G. Asmussen, PhD, CPA  
Principal

C: Members of the Inver Hills Developmental Education Task Force

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## Inver Hills Developmental Education Task Force Recommendations

### I. Background

In March 2014, Dr. Christina Royal, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs for Inver Hills Community College, created an internal task force to development recommendations for improving the effectiveness of the college's developmental education. She contracted with Dr. John G. Asmussen from Asmussen Research & Consulting LLC to facilitate the work of the task force. Dr. Asmussen previously had conducted research studies of the developmental education programming at Inver Hills and four other colleges in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) system.

The following faculty, staff, and administrators served on the task force:

- Nicole Bietz, Counseling
- Catherine Breuer, Institutional Research (designated by Wendy Marson, IR Director)
- Kim Elvecrog, Reading
- Laura Funke, English/EAP/Reading faculty
- Kevin Gyolai, Dean of Science, Technology, Engineering & Math
- Carrie Naughton, Math faculty
- Mary Thompson, English faculty
- Milissa Troen, Career Development & Counseling
- Laurel Watt, Reading/ Study Skills faculty
- Matt Williams, English faculty

Also, Val Beighley, from the Inver Hills Assessment Department, participated in the April 14, 2014, meeting to help the task force gain an understanding of the current assessment practices.

The task force held four meetings at the college. It met for one hour on March 31, 2014; April 14, 2014; April 28, 2014; and May 12, 2014. Between meetings, members exchanged relevant literature and other ideas. Dr. Asmussen distributed a draft report for members to review on Friday, May 2, 2014. Members provided feedback on the draft and agreed on the final contents at its meeting on Monday, May 12, 2014. Dr. Asmussen distributed a revised draft report to task force members on Tuesday, May 13, 2014 and incorporated their feedback into this final report.

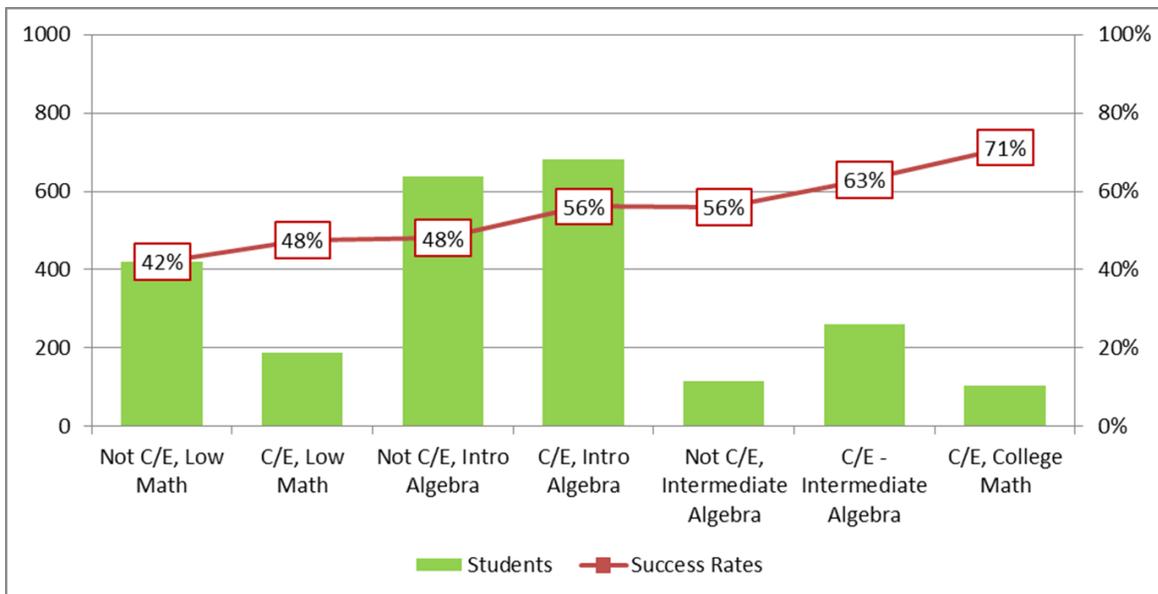
## II. Overview

At its initial meeting on March 31, 2014, Dr. Royal challenged the task force to develop innovative recommendations for improving the effectiveness of the college’s developmental education. She challenged the task force to be bold and suggest possible experiments and pilot projects

Dr. Asmussen reviewed MnSCU Policy 3.3 and Procedure 3.3.1, *Assessment for Course Placement*, with the task force. Asmussen emphasized that the system policy granted the college substantial authority to establish its own policy for making placement decisions. If the task force had ideas that did not conform to the policy, it would have to request an exception from the system office. Based on Asmussen’s previous discussions with system office officials, he thought they would be receptive to new ideas about placement practices.

Dr. Asmussen also briefly reviewed the results from his studies of developmental education. He reiterated that Inver Hills showed the best results from any of the colleges he had studied, but, as shown in Figure 1, a substantial gap of almost 30% points existed in the success rates between students who were assessed as college ready in English and math (71% success rate) and students who placed in the lowest developmental English and math courses (42% success rate).

**Figure 1. Inver Hills Community College: Student Success Rates by Entering Placement Levels Fall 2006, 2007, 2008 First-Time Students**



**Notes:**

- C/E = College English.
- Success indicates proportion of first-time students who within four years of entering college had earned an academic credential (certificate or Associate degree), transferred to another college or university after making good academic progress at Inver Hills (GPA of at least 2.0), or remained enrolled at Inver Hills.

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Asmussen reviewed broad areas of possible strategies from which the task force could draw ideas for its recommendations, including assessment and advising practices, developmental course design, and the use of developmental courses as pre-requisites for completing academic program requirements. The task force decided to focus its initial attention on ideas related to assessment and course placement practices and later consider other ideas. Val Beighley, from the Inver Hills Assessment Department, attended the second meeting and helped the task force gain an understanding of Inver Hills' current assessment and advising practices.

After reviewing relevant literature (see annotated reference listing in Appendix A), discussing practices used at other colleges, and debating the merits of alternative approaches, the task force developed a three-part series of recommendations for improving developmental education practices:

- 1) Improve practices for gateway course placements,
- 2) Design guided pathways to accelerate completion of College English, and
- 3) Monitor student progress and provide timely interventions.

Subsequent sections of this report discuss the recommendations in each of these areas.

### III. Improve Practices for Gateway Course Placements

One significant problem associated with developmental education is that sole reliance on a cognitive exam, like ACCUPLACER, misplaces too many students into their initial gateway courses (English and math). Scott-Clayton (2012) estimated a “severe error rate” of 33% for English placements based on a sole cognitive exam, with most students being misplaced into developmental English when they could have earned a grade of “B” or higher without any developmental coursework. Scott-Clayton and Rodriguez (2012) found that under-placed students were discouraged and had a significantly lower rate of degree completions. Asmussen also cited examples from his research where significant numbers of students who had tested into developmental English, were able to skip developmental courses and self-select directly into College English, and completed College English at the same rates as students who had tested into College English. The research reviewed and practices cited provided compelling evidence that due to its sole reliance on the ACCUPLACER Reading Comprehension subtest for making most English placement decisions, Inver Hills likely had significant numbers of students who were testing into developmental English, but could handle college-level English course without any developmental coursework.

In recent years, over 40% of first-time students entering Inver Hills have been placed into developmental reading and writing courses, which they must complete before enrolling in College English (ENG 1108 at Inver Hills). Over 90% of the students have been placed into developmental math courses.

The task force concentrated its efforts on reducing the number of developmental English placements. College English is a much more unforgiving gateway course than math. Students must complete College English to earn almost any academic credential at Inver Hills (the only exceptions are a few certificate programs, but they do not produce large numbers of graduates). For math, though, Inver Hills offers students several options that do not require completion of the full developmental math sequence. In recent years, the math faculty created MATH 820, which offers a shortened developmental math sequence for completion of Math for the Liberal Arts (MATH 1101), Introduction to Statistics (MATH 1103), or Math Foundations (MATH 1107)<sup>1</sup>. Other students may complete Logic (PHIL 1120), which has no developmental math prerequisites, as a means for satisfying Goal Area 4 of the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum.

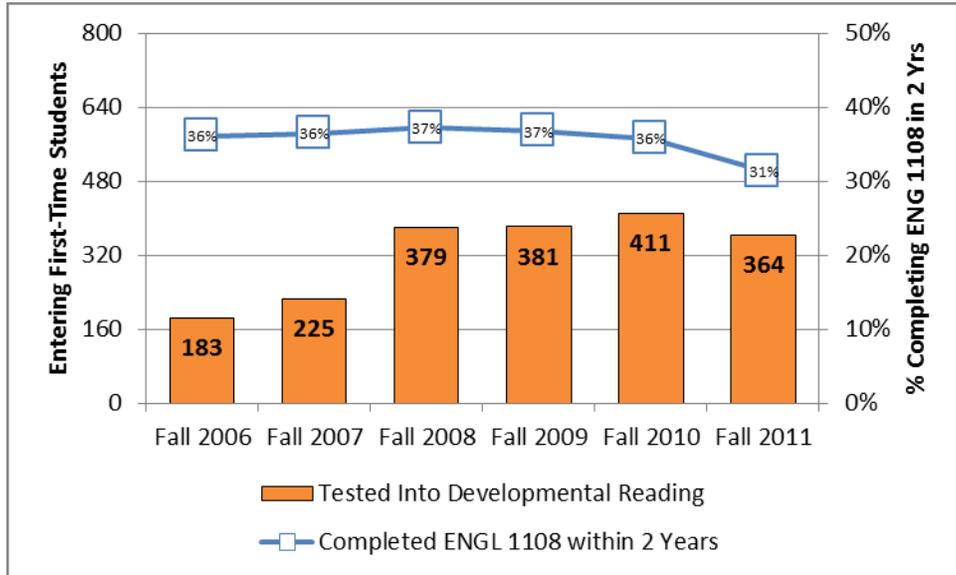
As shown in Figure 2, in recent years, about 400 first-time students have been placed into developmental English each year, with only about one-third of them completing College English within two years of entering the college. Figure 3 compares the educational outcomes of developmental readers that had not completed College English and developmental readers who completed College English. It illustrates the power of College English as a gateway to success.

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<sup>1</sup> Students who place at Introductory Algebra must complete only one developmental math course (MATH 820) as a prerequisite for these three college-level math courses. Students who place at Pre-Algebra would have to complete two developmental math courses (MATH 740 and 820) as prerequisites for those college-level math courses. Students who wanted to complete College Algebra (MATH 1118) must complete the traditional developmental math sequence (through MATH 940) which would include three developmental math courses for Pre-Algebra placements and two courses for Introductory Algebra placements.

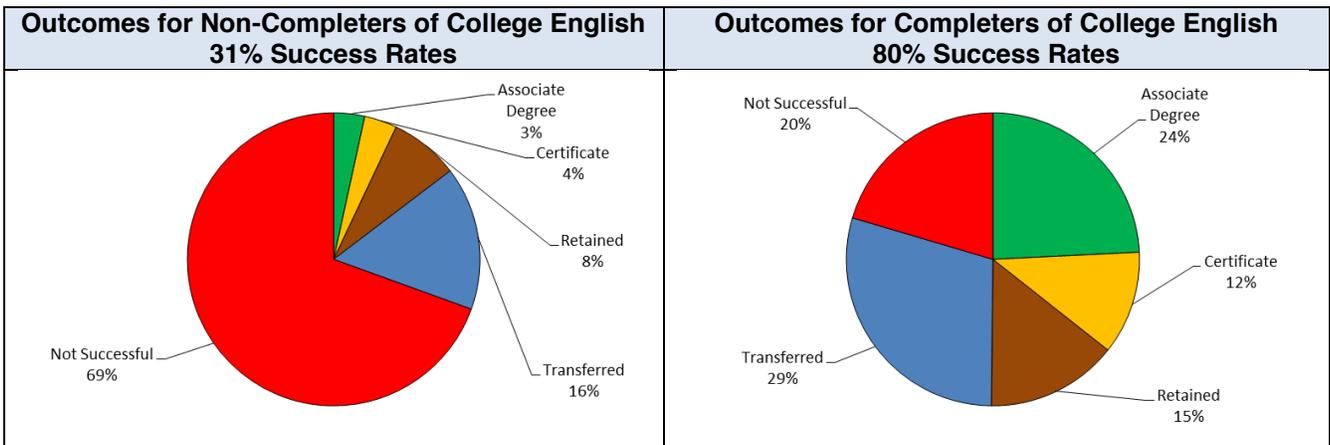
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**Figure 2. Inver Hills Community College: College English Completion Rates for Developmental Readers – Fall 2006 through Fall 2011 First-Time Cohorts**



Sources: Fall 2006 to Fall 2008: Asmusen Research & Consulting LLC.  
Fall 2009 to Fall 2011: Inver Hill's Institutional Research.

**Figure 3. Inver Hills Community College: Comparative Educational Outcomes for Developmental Readers Depending on College English Completion**

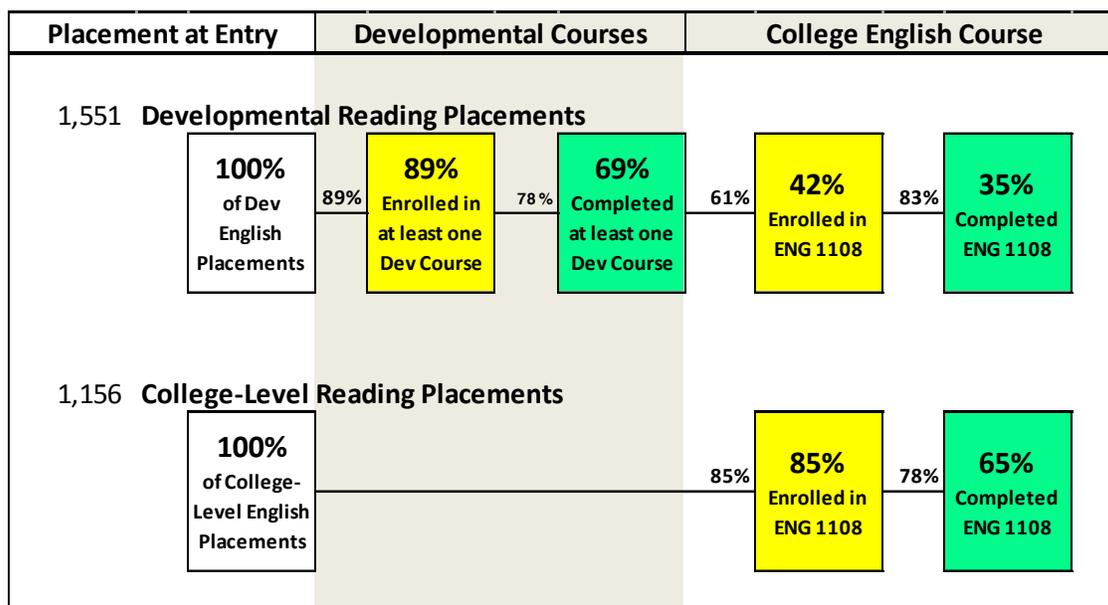


Source: Asmusen Research & Consulting LLC. Analysis was based on measuring educational outcomes over a 4-year period for developmental readers from the Fall 2006 to Fall 2008 first-time student cohorts. College English completers were defined as students completing ENG 1108 within two years of initially enrolling at Inver Hills.

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Students who placed at College English completed the course within two years at almost twice the rate as students who placed into developmental reading. As shown in Figure 4, 65% of the college-level readers completed ENG 1108 within two years, compared to only 35% of the developmental readers<sup>2</sup>. Students who placed into developmental reading at Inver Hills usually had to negotiate through 6-8 exit points in order to complete College English. An exit point occurs either when a student does not enroll in the next-level course or does not complete a course. Conversely, students who placed into College English encountered only two exit points: not enrolling in ENG 1108 and not completing the course.

**Figure 4: Comparison of College English Completions for Developmental Placements and College-Level Placements: Fall 2009, 2010, and 2011 Cohorts.**



Source: Graphic by Asmusen Research & Consulting; Data Analysis by Inver Hills Institutional Research.

Note: Based on course enrollments and completions in the first two years of college.

Obviously, the number of exit points is reduced if students are able to achieve higher reading placements. Potentially, exit points also could be reduced if more developmental courses could be integrated and offered as co-requisites to College English (discussed more in the Section IV of the report).

<sup>2</sup> ENG 1108 completion rates were substantially lower for students who placed at READ 90, with 8 possible exit points, than students who placed at READ 93/94, with 6 possible exit points. As shown in Figure 5 in the next section, 26% of READ 90 placements completed ENG 1108 within two years, while 38% of READ 93/94 placements did so from first-time students who entered with the Fall 2006 to 2008 cohorts.

### Recommended Strategies for Improving English Placements

The literature provides a resounding message that the college would be better served by using multiple measures for making course placement decisions. Hence, the lead recommendation from the task force is as follows:

- 1. Use multiple measures, rather than sole reliance on ACCUPLACER subtest scores, to assign course placements to students. Collect high school transcripts as an additional source of evidence for making course placement decisions. Explore the use of non-cognitive tests, such as GRIT or LASSI, and writing samples to further reduce the risk of misplacing students.**

The task force recommends that Inver Hills collect high school transcripts from students who have graduated from high school in the past five years<sup>3</sup>, as an additional source of evidence for making course placement decisions. When the college has gained more experience with interpreting college readiness based on high school transcripts, it could consider requesting an exception from the MnSCU system office to waive ACCUPLACER testing under certain circumstances, e.g. completion of adequate college preparatory coursework in high school with a sufficient GPA. In the meantime, though, the task force recommends that Inver Hills continue to administer the ACCUPLACER exam unless a student meets one of the exemptions currently cited by MnSCU Procedure 3.3.1. The task force members acknowledged that collecting transcripts will require additional time and effort from its admissions staff, but believes that the benefits to students will outweigh the costs. Several recent research studies have found that high school transcripts often provide valuable evidence about a student's college readiness that is not captured with standardized cognitive tests. Transcripts are an indication of the level of effort, commitment, motivation, and perseverance that students exerted in their high school courses, factors that are not measured by standardized cognitive test like ACCUPLACER yet contribute to their ability to handle college-level coursework.

MnSCU policy mandates the use of ACCUPLACER for most first-time students. MnSCU Procedure 3.3.1, Part 3, Subpart D allows colleges to gather additional evidence for making placement decisions, as long as the process is administered at no cost to the student. Part 5, Subpart B of the procedure empowers each college to use additional evidence to override the ACCUPLACER test score, as follows:

A student may be exempted from course placement decisions that are based on assessment scores according to institutionally-based criteria. A college or university shall specify the type(s) of additional evidence that will be considered to exempt a student from the results of the assessment scores and the processes that will be used to make the decision.

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<sup>3</sup> For first-time students who have been out of high school for over five years, the college could seek more recent evidence, such as a non-cognitive assessment or a writing sample, to augment ACCUPLACER test scores for making placement decisions.

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To operationalize this recommendation, Inver Hills will need to enact a policy that will address the following issues.

- The policy would put into place guidelines for interpreting high school GPAs and/or coursework that would justify college-level placements. Evidence from Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson (2009) suggests that a high school GPA of 3.0 or higher would be a conservative cut-point for admitting students into College English. North Carolina Community Colleges (2013) accepts a high school GPA of 2.6 or higher for students who have completed four high school math courses as evidence of college readiness in both English and math. GPA alone likely does not provide sufficient evidence for math placements - the level of high school math coursework also needs to be considered.
- The policy would determine whether students who test into a developmental level but are placed into college-level courses based on alternative evidence will be mainstreamed into courses with students who tested into college-level or be restricted to course sections that offer supplemental support services.
- The policy will determine how to deal with students who are unable or unwilling to provide a transcript, including late registrants<sup>4</sup>, home schooled students, and students with a GED. In such cases, the college could revert to sole reliance on ACCUPLACER test results or seek alternative evidence such as a non-cognitive assessment or writing sample.

As discussed further in Section V, the college must create an expeditious method for coding<sup>5</sup> these placement decisions in the student records system to permit student course registrations and later to facilitate an evaluation of the effectiveness of using high school transcripts.

Boylan (2009) argues that colleges could strengthen the accuracy of their placements if they used multiple measures to “triangulate” developmental needs based on the cognitive, affective, and personal factors of each student. The ACCUPLACER exam and high school transcript will provide evidence of a student’s cognitive ability. The high school transcript will provide indirect evidence of many affective traits, such as attitude toward learning, motivation, and willingness to expend time on academic tasks. A non-cognitive exam, such as GRIT or LASSI, would provide more direct evidence of the affective factors important for academic success. Accordingly, the task force believes that Inver Hills should continue to explore the use of non-cognitive instruments. The background questions used as part of the ACCUPLACER exam also gather important information about a student’s personal circumstances that might have a bearing on their academic success, e.g. hours of work, family obligations, reading habits, etc. This information could be used to help students identify support services that would be useful to them

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<sup>4</sup> Late registrants are a problem for many colleges and quite often do not achieve the same level of academic success as timely registrants. These students may be applying for college after the semester has started, not allowing sufficient time to assemble the kind of evidence needed to make valid course placement decisions or advise them properly.

<sup>5</sup> The college will need to consult with its Enrollment Services, Assessment, and Institutional Research staff to create an efficient method for coding placement decisions. Manually coding comprehensive high school coursework and grades would be expensive, unwarranted, and is not recommended. Instead the college could create a series of waiver codes that would correspond to the provisions in its policy on which the placement decision was based.

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or changes in personal circumstances that they might consider, e.g. reducing hours of work during the school year.

The task force further recommends that the use of multiple measures be augmented with the following action:

### **2. Stipulate circumstances when students will be empowered to make self-placement decisions with direction.**

The task force recommends that Inver Hills stipulate circumstances students when students will be empowered to make self-placement decisions about their course choices. The task force would limit self-placement privilege to students who had test scores that were “close” to college-level or had completed high school coursework above a prescribed standard of performance. It would not advocate self-placement privileges for students who placed in the lowest developmental levels, such as READ 90. Furthermore, the task force recommends that students be provided with sufficient direction to make informed placement decisions. Eligible students could be counseled on making informed decisions during orientation sessions or in individual meetings with advisors or assessment staff. Part of the self-placement decision should be focused on whether students will add supplemental courses such as On Course, Study Skills, Career Development, or First Year Experience to enhance their chances of completing college-level courses.

Some states, notably Florida, no longer allow colleges to make mandatory placement assignments into developmental courses, but permit students to decide whether to register for developmental coursework. Some observers fear that this practice will revert to the era of the 1970’s when too many students struggled with college-level work that they were not prepared to handle. Advocates of self-selection counter, though, that that risk may be diminished by ensuring that students are informed adequately about their odds of completing a college-level course without first completing developmental work. Information from multiple measures could help direct students toward appropriate choices.

Asmussen also has observed students at other MnSCU colleges who defied their developmental English placements, enrolled directly into College English, and completed it at the same rate as students who tested into College English. Most likely those students had the self-confidence, commitment and motivation needed to succeed in the college-level course, despite their lower scores on the cognitive assessment. Student self-placement with direction could provide Inver Hills’ students with another avenue to expedite the completion of gateway courses like College English.

As a further safeguard for improving the validity of placement decisions, the task force recommends that Inver Hills:

### **3. Empower faculty members to recommend early exits from developmental courses.**

The use of multiple measures and student self-placements with direction should improve the validity of placement decisions. Yet, some students still may be enrolled in developmental

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courses that they do not need. Accordingly, the task force recommends that faculty members be empowered to recommend early exits from developmental courses. Faculty members on the task force indicated that they sometimes identify students in their developmental courses who could have been placed directly into the college-level course. Their discovery usually occurs too late in the semester to reschedule courses for the students in the current semester. For students who were in READ 90 courses, faculty members could recommend that additional developmental reading and English courses be waived for these students. Students enrolled in READ 93 or 94 or ENGLISH 99, though, would not be able to switch into a College English course after the drop/add period had passed and likely would have to endure an unnecessary developmental course.

Accommodating use of early exits from developmental courses will require making some changes to course schedules or structures. The model recommended in the next section, offering developmental courses as a co-requisite, would be more amenable to operationalizing exits from unneeded developmental courses based on faculty assessments occurring before the drop/add period lapses.

### Other Placement Ideas Considered, but Not Recommended

Finally, the task force considered, but does not recommend other ideas related to course placement practices, including

- Require students who placed into developmental reading courses to wait on completing their math assessments until completion of the developmental reading coursework. Although math placements are highly correlated with reading placements, the task force was reluctant to recommend a wholesale delay in math assessments for developmental readers. Instead, it offers recommendations in the next section related to bundling target courses for students who register low reading scores.
- Make retesting mandatory for any student whose initial test scores place them into READ 90. Inver Hills currently encourages all students who initially placed into READ 90 to retest, but retesting is not mandatory. For the Fall 2012 placements, 90 of 339 students (27%) who initially placed at READ 90 retested and 60 students (2/3rds of the re-testers) improved their reading placements with 49 students moving into READ 93/94 placements and 11 students moving into College English (ENG 1108). Similar results were achieved by students who initially placed into READ 93/94: 92 of 387 READ 93/94 placements retested and 60 of the re-testers moved into College English. It is unlikely, though, that mandatory retesting would produce the same kind of positive results as the current voluntary retesting practice.
- Expand test preparatory opportunities and encourage students to utilize them before taking the placement tests. It is unclear whether students would heed more encouragement or exam preparatory opportunities.

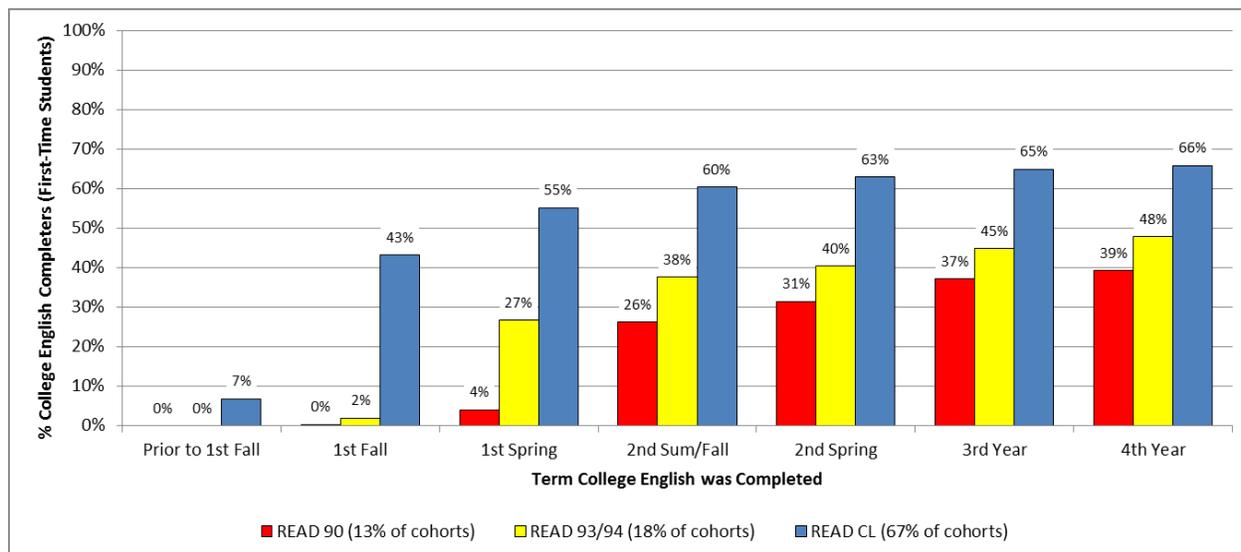
Although these ideas have merit, the task force does not recommend them at this time. Its other recommendations are hoped to provide sufficient improvement to the validity of the college's placement practices and the resultant student success rates.

#### IV. Design Guided Pathways to Accelerate Completion of College English

The other significant problem associated with developmental education is that it takes too long for students to complete. Adding developmental levels may improve results in specific courses, but more students often will exit from college before reaching college-level courses resulting in lower degree completions (Hern, 2012; Hodara & Jaggars, 2014).

The previous section cited the power of College English as a gateway course. As shown in Figure 5, though, only 27% of Inver Hills students who placed into READ 93/94 completed College English in their first year and only 4% of students who placed at READ 90 were able to do so, whereas the majority of students who placed into College English, completed it in the first year.

**Figure 5. Inver Hills Community College Time-to-Complete College English by Entering Reading Placements Fall 2006, 2007, and 2008 Cohorts**



If the strategies discussed in the previous section work as intended, more Inver Hills students will be placed into College English, thus, streamlining their completion of the course. Nonetheless, a significant number of students will continue to need developmental reading and writing courses.

The traditional approach structures developmental courses in a sequence that must be completed over a series of semesters as a prerequisite to College English. One strategy for accelerating the completion of College English is to offer a developmental English course as a co-requisite for College English, rather than as a prerequisite. Venezia and Hughes (2013) credited this approach with greatly increasing the success of students enrolled at the Community College of Baltimore County. Century College has recently begun offering this arrangement to its students and is pleased with the early results. North Hennepin Community College recently approved the idea and plans to implement it in the Fall 2015. The task force recommends a similar strategy:

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### **4. Design an accelerated package of courses that will enable READ 93/94 students to complete College English in one term.**

Because of the importance of College English as a gateway course, the task force recommends that Inver Hills find ways to improve the timeliness of its completion, particularly for students placed into READ 93/94. Under the current structure, students who are placed into READ 93/94 must complete one developmental reading course (either READ 93 or READ 94) and one developmental writing course (English 99) before registering for College English (English 1108). If both developmental courses are taken in a student's first semester, the College English course can be completed in the second semester. As Figure 5 showed, though, only 27% of first-time students who entered in a Fall term had completed College English by the end of their first year (first Spring term).

Adopting a strategy similar to the Baltimore County ALP approach will allow READ 93/94 placements to complete College English in one term. The task force believes that Inver Hills will be able to design a similar approach within the parameters of its existing learning community structure. The learning community would be registered for a ten credit package of courses that includes READ 93 or 94, ENG 99, and ENG 1108. The developmental courses would be designed to serve as co-requisites supporting the completion of the ENG 1108 course. In addition, students would be encouraged to register for one or two credits of other support courses, such as On Course, Study Skills, First Year Experience, or Career Development, that are appropriate to their circumstances. Accordingly, students could meet the threshold for being full-time students (12 or more credits), but be focused on early completion of the important English gateway course. There would be room for them to register for additional courses, but caution should be used to preserve their odds of success (see further discussion with recommendation #5).

The task force was attracted to certain features of the ALP design that should be considered by Inver Hills:

- ENG 1108 enrollments would have a mix of students who tested into ENG 1108 and students who were enrolled in the developmental co-requisites. ALP reserves 12 of 28 seats in a College English course for students taking the developmental co-requisites.
- Class sizes for the developmental co-requisites are limited to 12 students. The 12 students are linked to the same College English course. Because of the added cost of small class sizes, a less desirable option would be to have a class size of 24 students who would be linked to two separate College English courses (mixed with students who had tested into those courses).

The task force also liked the use of learning communities because they would allow inclusion of reading courses in the acceleration model. Members felt it was important to ensure that the reading and writing departments worked together in any acceleration initiative.

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The task force recommends a different strategy for students who placed into READ 90.

### **5. Design a guided pathway that will enable READ 90 students to experience success in their first term and complete College English in their second term.**

If the multiple measures strategy, as outlined in the previous section, works as intended, then it is reasonable to assume that READ 90 students indeed will need an additional level of developmental coursework to foster their success in College English, and an accelerated strategy will not work effectively for them in their first term. The task force, thus, recommends that students who face such serious reading challenges be encouraged to improve their reading skills before registering in other college courses that rely on solid reading skills. Because academic success in a student's first term is crucial for long-term college success, the task force further recommends that students who place in READ 90 be encouraged to register for a part-time credit load (6-11 credits) in their first term and concentrate on building the reading and writing skills needed to be successful in an accelerated strategy, as discussed in recommendation #4, in their second term.

Asmussen Research & Consulting analyzed first term course-taking patterns for students from the Fall 2006 to Fall 2008 cohorts who had placed into READ 90. The analysis, as shown in Table 1, illustrates that READ 90 students were able to complete certain college-level courses, but not other courses in the same term that they were enrolled in READ 90.

**Table 1: First Term Course Completion Rates of READ 90 Students in Selected Courses: Fall 2006, 2007, and 2008 Cohorts of First-Time Students**

Course Subject	Number of Course Registrations	Completion Rate (1)
Art	44	73%
Health	24	71%
Physical Education	32	66%
Communication	53	64%
Sociology	28	64%
Developmental Math	118	44%
Biology	22	27%
General Psychology	11	22%

(1) Completion rates were based on 229 READ 90 students from these cohorts who enrolled in one of these courses in their first Fall term and earned a grade of A, B, C, or P in the course.

Table 1 suggests the kinds of courses that READ 90 students might be able to complete successfully before they have improved their reading and writing skills. Although the sample sizes were very small for Biology and General Psychology (perhaps because students were being advised not to take these courses), the results were very poor and indicate the importance of reading skills for completing those courses. The results for developmental math courses also were not encouraging and suggest that it might be advisable for READ 90 students to improve their reading skills before enrolling in those courses as well.

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Table 2 shows a recommended rubric for students and advisors to use when matching course placements and guided pathways.

**Table 2: Recommended Rubric for Reading and English Placements**

Recommended Placement <sup>6</sup>	Criteria	Comments
ENG 1108 (College English)	ACCUPLACER Reading Comprehension Subtest Score of 78 or higher or a sufficient ACT or SAT score AND non-cognitive evidence or high school transcript evidence of high likelihood of college-level course completion	High school transcript data would only be used for students who graduated from a high school within the past five years.
ENG 1108 with appropriate support course(s) <sup>7</sup>	ACCUPLACER Reading Comprehension Subtest Score of 78 or higher or sufficient ACT or SAT score AND non-cognitive evidence or high school transcript evidence of possible difficulty with college-level course completion  OR ACCUPLACER Reading Comprehension Subtest Score of 63 or higher AND non-cognitive evidence or high school transcript evidence of high likelihood of college-level course completion	
Accelerated Learning Community: ENG 1108 + READ 93/94 + ENG 99 + Appropriate support course(s) <sup>7</sup> in the same term	ACCUPLACER Reading Comprehension Subtest Score of 63 or higher AND non-cognitive evidence or high school transcript evidence of possible difficulty with college-level course completion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subject to ACCUPLACER Reading Comprehension retest<sup>8</sup></li> <li>• Faculty member may waive READ 93/94 or ENG 99 based on assessments administered early in the term<sup>9</sup></li> <li>• Students may self-select into traditional developmental sequence, particularly if able to attend only part-time</li> </ul>
Focus on READ 90 completion with Appropriate support course(s) <sup>7</sup>	ACCUPLACER Reading Comprehension Subtest Score Below 63, but over 35 <sup>10</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subject to ACCUPLACER Reading Comprehension retest<sup>8</sup></li> <li>• Faculty members may waive some or all of 2<sup>nd</sup> semester developmental courses based on a student's performance in READ 90</li> </ul>

<sup>6</sup> Students who placed into ENG 1108 or READ 93/94 would be empowered to self-select their courses after discussing the evidence cited in this rubric with a representative from the Assessment Center or an advisor.

<sup>7</sup> Support courses may include On Course, Study Skills, Career Development, or First Year Experience, as warranted.

<sup>8</sup> Students who tested into developmental reading are encouraged, but not required, to retake the ACCUPLACER Reading Comprehension test after completing a preparatory module.

<sup>9</sup> The early assessments would have to be part of the learning community structure and occur soon enough for students to make registration changes during the drop/add period.

<sup>10</sup> Students scoring below 35 would be referred to Adult Basic Education to help them improve their placement score.

### V. Monitor Student Progress and Provide Timely Interventions

The task force recommendations were based on sound research and observations about innovative practices, but it will be essential for Inver Hills to evaluate the effectiveness of any new initiatives to ensure that they produce the intended results. Close monitoring of student progress will allow the college to provide timely interventions for individual students, if warranted. Although the task force did not have sufficient time to evaluate existing Inver Hills' practices for issuing early alerts that students were encountering academic difficulty, task force members did discuss problems with students who failed to attend classes regularly at the beginning of the term. Accordingly, the task force recommends that the college:

#### 6. Evaluate current practices for class attendance and continue to refine the college's Early Alert Notification program.

Faculty members on the task force expressed frustration with the current Inver Hills *Class Attendance* policy. It stipulates that:

Students are expected to attend all sessions of each class in which they are enrolled. If an illness or emergency results in an absence, students should meet with their instructors to determine if missed work can be completed. A student may receive a course grade of FN or NC after two consecutive weeks (or equivalent in accelerated courses/terms) of unexcused absence at any time during the semester. Students who receive an FN grade may request to have their grade changed to a W (withdraw) if done so by the course's withdrawal deadline. Class attendance is defined as being physically present in the classroom. Online attendance is defined as having submitted an assignment, taken a quiz, or posted/made a course content-related comment on the discussion/chat board for the course in which the student is registered.

The two week timeframe for unexcused absences exceeds the timeframe for tuition refunds, so students who are subject to the consequences of non-attendance will remain obligated for their tuition payments. It also is problematic for late registrants who enroll after the start of classes.

Inver Hills has developed an Early Alert Notification program and continues to refine its use for improving student success. The current Inver Hills *Early Alert Notification* policy is as follows:

Early Alert Program Objective: Improve success for identified at-risk students and facilitate instructor/student communication. Increase utilization of student resources such as: Counseling and Advising, the Learning Center, and faculty office hours to improve student success and retention.

Instructors are encouraged to issue early alert notifications as needed throughout the semester. These reports are intended to notify students who are doing less than C work and/or are not attending class regularly. Alerted students receive an email; if unopened, a phone call and letter follow.

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Previously, instructors were only able to submit alerts in weeks one, five, and twelve of the semester. Currently, instructors can submit an alert at any time during weeks one through twelve of the semester. Instructors have the opportunity to submit multiple alerts for the same student. In other words, instructors could send notification of an attendance concern multiple times in week one and subsequent weeks. Going forward, instructor comments will be included with alerts, a faculty taskforce will be assembled to evaluate and continue to develop the program, and a potential referral program to the Learning Center and Counseling & Advising is in progress.

Early alerts issued late in the semester come too late to warn students about the consequences of not attending classes. Research on early alert systems (see for example, the Signals system developed by Purdue University) suggests that alerts are effective only if they occur early enough in the semester (usually the first or second week of the semester) to allow students to take corrective action.

Finally, the task force recommends that Inver Hills:

### **7. Create an evaluation plan for monitoring the effectiveness of initiatives designed to improve placement practices and student success.**

To ensure that new initiatives produce the intended results, periodic evaluations of their effectiveness should be planned and conducted. The evaluations should be scheduled after sufficient time has lapsed to obtain reliable results about program effectiveness. Other issues related to program evaluation that merit consideration include:

- Develop a coding scheme to identify the basis for making course placements, particularly when high school transcripts or non-cognitive evidence was used to override ACCUPLACER test results. The college should create expeditious coding schemes and avoid methods that will be unduly time-consuming and complicated.
- Ensure that new initiatives receive the necessary investment of time and resources to facilitate their success. How new initiatives are implemented is as important as which initiatives are chosen for implementation.
- Use existing data as a baseline for setting targeted outcomes and evaluating the effectiveness of new initiatives. Some of the historical measures cited in this report, including proportion of students placed into developmental reading and completion rates for College English in the first year of enrollment could be used as baselines for setting targeted outcomes and evaluating progress.
- Use both short-term measures, such as developmental course completion rates, and longer-term measures such as completion rates of gateway courses and degree completions, to evaluate effectiveness. Relying only on rates of developmental course completion may provide misleading results, if overall success of a cohort is not considered.

## Inver Hills Developmental Education Task Force Recommendations

Although the task force focused its attention on completion of College English, several new initiatives are underway at Inver Hills and other MnSCU colleges to improve the effectiveness of developmental math programs. Accordingly, it will be important for:

- The Inver Hills Math department to continue monitoring the effectiveness of its non-STEM developmental track<sup>11</sup>. Also, it should continue to monitor the effectiveness and seek the results of alternative pathway options that other MnSCU colleges are implementing.

Developmental education is receiving lots of attention across the country and colleges are experimenting with a wide range of strategies for improving its effectiveness. Much can be learned from the experiences of other colleges, but care must be taken to ensure that Inver Hills implements any new initiatives carefully in its own environment and evaluates whether they produce the desired results.

Finally, the task force members noted that Inver Hills is in the process of remodeling its Assessment Center. The effectiveness of that change should be evaluated to ensure the new center is adequately equipped and funded to provide an environment conducive to student testing, e.g., sufficient staffing to advise students properly, availability of sufficient privacy, use of sound cancelling headphones if warranted.

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<sup>11</sup> In addition to adding MATH 820 as a shortened developmental math sequence for non-STEM majors, the Inver Hills Math department will eliminate its developmental math courses below MATH 740 (Pre-Algebra) next year. It will continue monitor the effects of these changes in the future.

## Appendix A: Annotated Reference Listing

Belfield, C., & Crosta, P. (2012). *Working Paper No. 42: Predicting Success in College: The Importance of Placement Tests and High School Transcripts*. New York, NY: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center.

- Found similar results as Scott-Clayton for students who were assessed with the ACCUPLACER exam.
- Both research studies (4 and 5) recommended that the “severe error rate” could be cut in half by using high school coursework and GPA in addition to standardized tests for making placement decisions.

Boatman, A. (March 2014). *Beyond Ready, Fire, Aim: New Solutions to Old Problems in College Remediation*. Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute.

- It is a problem that some students [placed into developmental courses] do not actually need remediation.
- One solution would be to use multiple measures for assessing course readiness, including Advanced Placement scores, courses taken in high school, high school GPA (North Carolina uses 2.6 high school GPA as cut for college readiness), or ACT/SAT admissions test scores.
- Another solution is to make developmental courses optional. Allow students to decide whether to enroll in developmental courses based on their assessment test scores and other knowledge of their academic preparedness.
- It is another problem that it takes students too long to complete their developmental coursework.
- Recommends creating developmental courses as co-requisites, rather than prerequisites for college-level courses.
- Recommends use of self-paced, online courses, tailored to the unique needs of each student.

Bowen, W., Chingos, M., & McPherson, M. (2009). *Crossing the finish line: Completing college at America's public universities*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

- Extensive research study that found high school GPA to be a better predictor of college graduation rates than standardized admissions test scores.
- Cites methodology for categorizing high schools into three categories based on the rigor of their high school coursework and student demographics.

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- Found that students with a high school GPA of 3.0 was a reasonable cut-point for identifying whether students were or not students were college ready.

Boylan, H. (Spring 2009). *Targeted Intervention for Developmental Education Students (T.I.D.E.S.)*. Journal of Developmental Education. Boone, NC: National Center for Developmental Education.

- Proposes alternative model for assessing, advising, and placing under-represented students in college.
- Concludes that traditional practice of placing students into remedial courses based on a single cut score on a cognitive assessment instrument is efficient, but not effective.
- Cites Sedlacek (2004) who “argues that the weaker a student’s cognitive skills, the more important other affective factors in student success.”
- Recommends that assessment practices use “multiple variables to triangulate cognitive, affective, and personal” characteristics of students.

Bracco, K.R., Dadgar, M., Austin, K., Klavin, B., Broek, M. Finklestein, N., Mundry, S. & Bugler, D. (2014). *Exploring the use of multiple measures for placement into college-level courses: Seeking alternatives or improvements to the use of a single standardized test*. San Francisco, CA: WestEd

- Surveys current practices for using multiple measures for course placement decisions.
- Cites limited evidence that multiple measures have increased placements in college-level courses without compromising course success rates.
- Encourages more experimentation and research into this emerging practice.

Duckworth, A. (2013). *The key to success? Grit*. TED Talks Education 6:12. Available online at [http://www.ted.com/talks/angela\\_lee\\_duckworth\\_the\\_key\\_to\\_success\\_grit](http://www.ted.com/talks/angela_lee_duckworth_the_key_to_success_grit)

- Grit is the tendency to sustain interest in and effort toward very long-term goals. It has great potential as a non-cognitive assessment. Available at no cost through the University of Pennsylvania. Online assessment tool available at [https://sasupenn.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_06f6QSOS2pZW9qR](https://sasupenn.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_06f6QSOS2pZW9qR)

Fay, M., Bickerstaff, S., & Hodara, M. (December 2013). *CCRC Research Brief No. 57: Why students do not prepare for math placement exams: Student Perspectives*. New York, NY: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center.

- Cites four reasons why students do not prepare adequately for math placement exams: (1) Misperceptions about stakes of the exam, (2) Lack of knowledge about preparatory

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materials, (3) Misunderstandings about why and how to prepare for exam, and (4) Lack of math confidence.

Hanover Research (January 2011). *Non-Cognitive Assessment In Higher Education, Prepared for Inver Hills Community College.*

- Cites need to reevaluate using course placement processes that rely solely on standardized achievement tests. Encourages use of non-cognitive assessments to augment traditional cognitive tests.
- Indicates that use of non-cognitive assessments is emerging, but still not common among community colleges.
- Lists potential non-cognitive assessment instruments and their costs.

Hern, K. (May/June 2012). Acceleration across California: Shorter pathways in developmental English and Math. *Change.*

- Touts the success of course acceleration projects created for the California Community Colleges.
- Includes a Path2Stats course designed to focus on developmental math topics needed to pass a Statistic course, not an Algebra course.
- Includes an accelerated developmental English course that integrates reading and writing topics.
- Identifies three principles critical for creating accelerated courses: (1) Backwards Design, (2) Just-in-time Remediation, and (3) Intentional Support for Affective Issues.

Hodara, M., & Jaggars, S. (March/April 2014). An examination of the impact of accelerating community college student's progression through developmental education. *The Journal of Higher Education, 85(2).*

- Based on a statistical analysis of students in the CUNY system, these researchers found that students with comparable backgrounds had lower rates of completing college-level courses if they enrolled in two developmental English courses, rather than one course.

Jenkins, D., & Cho, S. (Winter 2013). Get with the program .... And finish it: Building guided pathways to accelerate student completion. *New Directions for Community Colleges, 164.*

- Found that because community colleges offer many program choices, but often do not provide clear roadmaps on how to pursue them. As a result, many community college students, particularly students who have not decided on a major, are left confused and frustrated.

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- Identifies strategies for creating guided pathways to success and monitoring student progress with tools, such as Early Alert systems.

Nodine, T., Dadgar, M. Venezia, A. & Bracco, K.R. (2013). *Acceleration in developmental education*. San Francisco: WestEd.

- Cites three strategies for accelerating completion of developmental education: (1) Simultaneous enrollment in courses leading to a credential (mainstreaming), (2) Compression and sequence redesign, and (3) Modulation.

North Carolina Community Colleges (2013). *SuccessNC. Final Report 2013*. Available online <https://www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/pr/SuccessNCFinalReport/SuccessNCReport2013.pdf>

- Explains implementation of multiple measures to assess course readiness.
- Waives placement exams for students with 2.6 GPA or higher and completion of four high school math courses (including Algebra II) and places them at college-level English and math.
- Implements accelerated programs for completion of College English and College math.

Roksa, J., Jenkins, D., Jaggars, S. S., Zeidenberg, M., & Cho, S.-W. (2009). *Strategies for promoting gatekeeper course success among students needing remediation: Research report for the Virginia community college system*. New York, NY: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center.

- Found that students who did not abide by their recommended placement in developmental education had similar rates of taking and passing the first college-level English or math course as students who did take a developmental course in the subject. Particularly with respect to English, there were no notable differences in passing rates between those students who were referred to developmental courses and took them, and those referred who did not.

Scott-Clayton, J. (2012). *Working Paper No. 41: Do High-Stakes Placement Exams Predict College Success?* New York, NY: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center.

- Estimates a “severe error rate” of 33% for English placements and 24% for Math placements when placements were made solely based on a standardized assessment test, COMPASS in this case. An estimated 29% of students placed in developmental English could have earned a “B” or higher in College English, while 4% of College English placements should have been assigned to developmental English. An estimated 18% of students placed in developmental Math could have earned a “B” or higher in College Algebra, while 6% of College Math placements should have been assigned to developmental Math.

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Scott-Clayton, J., & Rodriguez, O. (2012). *Development, Discouragement, or Diversion? New evidence on the effects of college remediation. [NBER Working Paper No. 18328]*. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

- Found negative effects associated with mis-assigning students who were prepared in English to remedial English courses, including significant declines in degree completion and increases in dropouts.
- Estimated that the diversionary effects of developmental education placed 25% of students into developmental Math and 70% of students into developmental English when they could have completed the related college-level course without developmental

Stenberg, J., & Funke, L. (Spring 2013). *Research on Acceleration Programs in Developmental Reading/Writing Programs*.

- The authors are reading and English faculty members at Inver Hills. This document contained numerous other references related to developmental education.

Venezia, A. Bracco, K.R., & Nodine, T. (2010). *One-Shot Deal? Students Perceptions of Assessment and Course Placement in California's Community Colleges*. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

- Qualitative study that gathered information from students about their perceptions and experience with the assessment and course placement process
- Found that most students were uninformed about assessments and unprepared for the content and format.
- Also found that students were unaware of the stakes involved with the test results.

Venezia, A., & Hughes, K. (Winter 2013). Acceleration strategies in the new developmental education landscape. *New Directions for Community Colleges, 164*.

- Touts the success of the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) at the Community College of Baltimore County. It is an example of an integrated reading and writing developmental English course offered as a co-requisite to College English.
- Cites system-wide strategies enacted by the Community College systems in Virginia and North Carolina. Both systems offer accelerated reading/writing developmental courses and modular developmental math courses.