



JOHN GLENN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Ohio Colleges Must Upgrade Remedial Education To Help Students Earn Degrees **Studies Show Current Programs Achieve Mixed Results**

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Scope of the Problem

To increase the number of college graduates, higher education institutions and policy makers must ensure that students required to take remedial courses do not drop out as a result of negative experiences.

College completion rates have remained stubbornly low across the country, especially among adult and non-traditional students enrolled in two-year community or technical schools. Nationally, only 37.9 percent of 25-64 year olds have at least an Associates Degree² and only half of individuals starting college in Ohio's public sector complete an associate degree within six years.³

The low college graduation rate in Ohio is of special concern because it frustrates the state's desires and efforts to create a pool of talented workers for today and tomorrow. These gaps in college achievement are particularly significant for ethnic and racial minorities at a time when the nation is poised to dramatically diversify.

Remediation coursework slows down college completion. About half of all students starting college finish within six years, but this number drops substantially for those taking remediation. Only 19 percent of those who started school as traditional age students finished a degree if they took remediation courses, as opposed to 15 percent of those who begin school when they are older than 24.

Moreover, because many remediation programs incorporate several classes, students with deficient skills must enroll in and complete a series of courses. While the average number of courses students take is more than two classes, Ohio schools do not limit the number of remedial classes students are required to take. Student at the lower end of skill-set levels can be asked to take up to 5 or 6 classes, depending on the school and the subject. This can discourage students from continuing their education.

Remediation

Also known as developmental education, is a series of non-credit courses created for students who fail to achieve school-based cutoff scores on placement tests. These courses are designed to prepare students for college-level credited courses. Generally, remediation is concentrated in core academic skills, such as math, reading and writing. In Ohio, close to 56 percent of students entering colleges or universities require some form of developmental education (Hawley, 2010).

¹ Remedial education and developmental education are used interchangeably in this paper.

² Ohio Board of Regents, Educational Attainment – Ohio Compared to the Nation, October 2009

³ Ohio Board of Regents, Time and Credits to Degree for Associate and Bachelor's Graduates, University System of Ohio Institutions, October 2010

There are no standards for remedial coursework in Ohio colleges and universities. Schools often have 3 or more levels of remedial classes, depending on a student's entry-level test scores. A common course number system is non-existent, nor is there a structure to transfer student credit in remedial courses. This prevents students from moving rapidly from non-credit courses to classes for credit that they can use to earn a degree. Moreover, the colleges rely on different assessments, including COMPASS, ACCUPLACER, and ACT tests. This confuses Ohio students who try to understand which skills they need to demonstrate to avoid remediation in college.⁴

Recommendations

Ohio's government has taken decisive action to address remediation. The recently published "Remediation Free Standards" established common cut scores across two- and four-year schools for students to sidestep remediation in college. For example, if students score at or above a 22 in the ACT, they would be able to enroll in college credit classes.⁵

The use of standards is a great step forward to establish clear guidelines for improving access to higher education. The common cut scores across campuses will also eliminate access disparities. However, this doesn't help Ohio high school graduates who lack the appropriate skills to succeed in college or careers, nor does it guide higher education institutions in helping adults who return to school but require additional support to succeed in college.

Achieving major gains in college graduation rates will require decisive action on the part of Ohio's government.

The following actions can help improve student graduation rates and enable the Remediation Free Standards to work:

- Develop assessments at K-12 secondary level to ensure students are screened for remediation free standards prior to college enrollment.
- Give students opportunities to complete remediation in the summer before entry, or for adults online, without preventing progress in higher education degree attainment.
- Continue pilot policy of diverting students from higher education to ABLE (Adult Basic Education) if they score at the lowest level on entrance exams.
- Create a "dashboard" at each college to track students who begin in remediation to ensure they pass the coursework the first time, register each term, and progress in credit completion.
- Experiment by combining remediation and vocational-technical courses to improve student motivation and commitment.

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⁴ Joshua D. Hawley with Shu Chen Chiang (2011), *Initial Survey of Assessment and Placement Tests Used for Placement into Developmental Education in Ohio*. Report for the Ohio Board of Regents, Columbus, OH

⁵ (BOR, 2012). Uniform Statewide Remediation Standard <http://tinyurl.com/aylfre3>



Key Findings

- Ohio's policy for remedial education must be improved. The system is not sufficient as a powerful intervention, especially for disadvantaged groups. It is comprised of un-credentialed teachers, an underdeveloped curriculum and too few textbooks.
- Participation in developmental education may help improve student academic achievement in the short term and help students stay enrolled and increase their college credits but more effort is needed to help students finish classes and receive high grades. Whatever colleges can do to improve early outcomes is likely to have long-term benefits for their students.
- Remedial education does not increase the likelihood for students to achieve an Associates or higher degree and may, in fact, reduce that likelihood. With all other factors constant, the odds of a student obtaining these degrees was about 30 percentage points lower for those enrolled in development education.
- The connection between remediation in community colleges and long-term improvement in college outcomes is difficult to establish. Only 15 percent of students in development education with test scores completed an Associates or higher degree, compared to 21 percent of students who did not take the remedial courses and obtained degrees.

New Performance Rating System

In December 2012, Ohio Gov. John Kasich signed into law House Bill 555, creating a new, phased-in academic performance rating system for school districts and schools, including an element that schools will be judged based on remediation outcomes for high schools.

Among other components, the new law:

- Initiates 15 performance "A-F" grading measures for schools
- Requires schools to report the percent of graduates needing remediation
- Establishes student remediation outcomes as a separate metric within the "Prepared for Success" component of the grading system



For more information on this study, please go to glenn.osu.edu/policy

The John Glenn School of Public Affairs provides in-depth analysis on public policy issues and would like to talk with you about your research needs. Contact Cindy Holodnak, Associate Director of Outreach & Engagement, at 614-292-7731 or email her at holodnak.1@osu.edu.