

Developmental Education Reform in Florida: Perceptions of Institutional Leaders and Plans for Institutional Actions

Center for Postsecondary Success

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Introduction and Background

Remedial coursework in postsecondary education—defined as coursework completed post-high school that is not yet college-level—has come under increased scrutiny in recent years due to the large number of students needing remediation and the high cost associated with providing it. In Florida alone, upwards of 78% of community college students were enrolled in at least one remedial course during the 2005–2006 academic year, costing the state almost 130 million dollars (Office of Program Policy and Government Accountability, 2006). Citing these significant costs and poor completion rates as major factors necessitating reform, the Florida Legislature passed Senate Bill (SB) 1720 in 2013, which dramatically changes the rules as to how developmental education is delivered and who is required to take it.

The new legislation requires colleges to reduce the number of students enrolled in developmental education and to decrease the time it takes for those who do enroll to reach college-level coursework. In order to reduce enrollment, SB 1720 prohibits colleges from requiring placement testing and developmental education for two groups of students: those who entered ninth grade in a Florida public school in the 2003–2004 school year and thereafter, provided they earned a standard high school diploma; and active-duty military members. Students who do not fall into one of these two groups are considered non-exempt and depending on of possible considerations (e.g., high school GPA, SAT scores, placement test scores), developmental education courses. In order to decrease the time that it takes all developmental education students to reach college-level coursework students must be provided with a variety of education delivery options including modularized, compressed, contextualized, and co-requisite courses. The definitions for those instructional strategies are as follows according to Senate Bill 1702:

- Modularized instruction that is customized and targeted to address specific skills gaps.
- Compressed course structures that accelerate student progression from developmental instruction to college-level coursework.
- Contextualized developmental instruction that is related to meta-majors.
- Co-requisite developmental instruction or tutoring that supplements credit instruction while a student is concurrently enrolled in a credit-bearing course.

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To facilitate the effectiveness of these new rules, admissions counseling is required for all incoming students. Admissions counseling allows colleges to inform students in need of developmental education, including those who are exempt, of available course options and campus resources.

There is a critical need to understand how the 28 colleges within the Florida College System (FCS) will respond to SB 1720 and how the legislation will impact student outcomes. Additionally, it is important to understand the extent to which the institutions' responses are consistent with research-based promising programs and practices and the legislative language included in SB 1720. To address these questions, we completed a mixed-methods research project that involved a survey of FCS institutional leaders and a content analysis of the implementation plans the colleges submitted to the Division of Florida Colleges (DFC). We found that:

- 1) Some distinctive patterns emerged from the colleges' responses toward developmental education reform, allowing us to statistically group them into three clusters;
- 2) Colleges tend to agree that the reform reflects a spirit of innovation by offering an opportunity to solve an old problem in new ways through increased inter-institutional collaboration;
- 3) While the colleges deem advising as critical for the success of the reform, they are concerned about the willingness of exempt students to take the advice of their advisors;
- 4) Colleges plan to use a wide range of measures to assess students' college readiness, but the colleges feel that the elimination of required placement tests is a missed opportunity to have valuable diagnostic information for the students and the college;
- 5) Colleges plan to offer a range of developmental education classes that employ different teaching strategies, but modularized and compressed formats are the most widely utilized;
- 6) Colleges plan to utilize technology in the classroom, during the advising process, and for training staff members; and
- 7) A number of colleges are skeptical as to whether the required changes will naturally result in increased student success.

Methodology

The data for this research were collected through two means: (1) a survey of FCS institutional leaders conducted in early spring 2014, and (2) a content analysis of the implementation plans those leaders submitted to the DFC for review. We combine these quantitative and qualitative data to draw conclusions about colleges' perceptions and behaviors regarding SB 1720.

The survey instrument for this project was administered to the chief academic affairs and chief student affairs officers at each of the 28 colleges in the FCS. This survey was specifically designed to target these campus leaders' perceptions of the reform and the way in which the colleges were planning to implement the directives of SB 1720. The survey contained 31 questions including demographic questions, seven-item Likert-scale questions, and open-ended questions. A total of 26 FCS leaders from 21 of the 28 colleges participated in the survey, leading to a college response rate of 75%.

Using the responses to this survey, we conducted a cluster analysis in order to understand how individual colleges grouped together based upon their responses. After completing this analysis and identifying three unique clusters, we computed descriptive statistics to assist in the understanding of the clusters. In addition, we conducted Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and post-hoc tests to determine whether responses varied significantly across clusters.

The content analysis portion of our research was an examination of the 28 implementation plans that the FCS institutions submitted to the Division of Florida Colleges in spring 2014. The implementation plans followed a standardized template that asked schools to elaborate on six different topics: their comprehensive advising plan, the documented student achievements that will supplement placement testing scores, developmental education strategies, student costs and financial aid opportunities, student success data collection, and any additional policies or procedures the colleges plan on implementing as a part of the reform. These plans were reviewed, coded, and analyzed using grounded theory. The research team began with a few general research questions about instructional strategies, advising, and support services, but allowed subthemes to emerge on their own.

Findings

In the descriptions and graphs that follow, we describe some of our most notable findings from both our survey results and the findings of our content analysis.

Theme 1: Some distinctive patterns emerged from the colleges' responses towards developmental education reform, allowing us to statistically group them into three clusters.

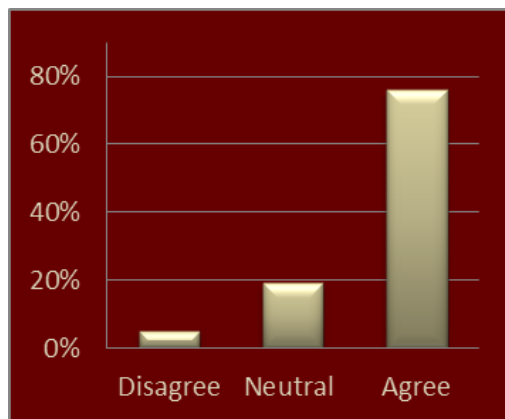


Figure 1. Increased collaboration

The most significant differences across clusters occurred in five domains: the extent to which colleges understand course delivery methods (specifically compressed, contextualized, and co-requisite structures), perceived benefits of the reform, anticipated changes in developmental education structure, online course offerings, and the ability of college leadership to interpret and implement the reform. To a lesser degree, clusters also differed in terms of advising strategies and technology.

With respect to the support necessary to successfully implement reform, all colleges indicated that strong buy-in across campus would be necessary for success; however, one cluster placed greater importance on the college leadership's interpretation and implementation of the reform as well as support from faculty and

the Division of Florida Colleges. While all clusters indicated a strong need for collaboration in the implementation, one cluster in particular indicated that cross-campus and collaborative relationships with the Division would be paramount to the success of future reform measures.

Theme 2: Colleges tend to agree that the reform reflects a spirit of innovation by offering an opportunity to solve an old problem in new ways through increased inter-institutional collaboration.

Many of the colleges report that the reform reflects a spirit of innovation that will likely increase support for the educational needs of students (i.e., support structures) and facilitate inter-institutional collaboration. Support structures are described in detail in the institutional plans and include skill-building workshops, online and in-person tutoring, and course-based services (e.g., summer bridge programs, basic skills “boot camp” style courses, Massive Open Online Courses [MOOCs], and student success courses). On a related note, colleges will offer students the chance to engage in web-based, self-exploration activities like personality tests to highlight personal strengths and weaknesses (e.g., Myers-Briggs) and career planning inventories to help students select an appropriate major. Additionally, the reform provides a unique opportunity for collaboration between faculty and staff in different departments (Figure 1). In particular, offices of academic affairs and student affairs will now be working hand in hand to achieve a common goal – student success.

Theme 3: While the colleges deem advising as critical for the success of the reform, they are concerned about the willingness of exempt students to take the advice of their advisors.

We asked respondents about anticipated changes to their advising systems. In general, respondents indicated that SB 1720 would require major changes to current advising processes. To begin, the implementation plans reflect that students will now be required to attend orientation and an advising session prior to course selection. In order to manage this increased workload, colleges will need to hire more advisors (Figure 2), create forms to standardize the advising experience, and provide updated training to all advisors. Another large-scale change is the implementation of early warning systems at many of the colleges. The ALERT program at Northwest Florida State College, for instance, calls attention to at-risk students through faculty referrals. Professors note the nature of a student's challenges in the electronic system so that an advisor can reach out and offer appropriate solutions and tips for future success.

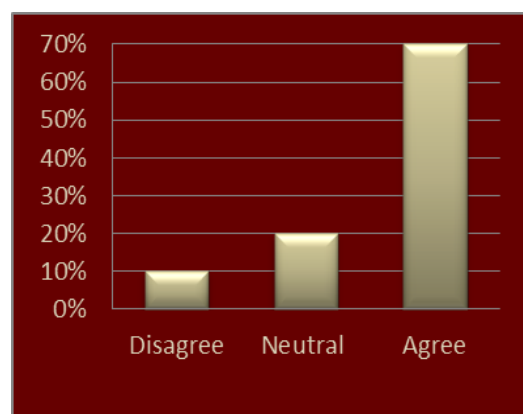


Figure 2. Need more advisors

Theme 4: Colleges plan to use a wide range of measures to assess students' college readiness, but the colleges feel that the elimination of required placement tests is a missed opportunity to have valuable diagnostic information for the students and the college.

In accordance with SB 1720, exempt students will no longer be required to take placement tests. Many of the colleges are concerned that this change will reduce the ability of advisors and exempt students to make informed decisions regarding course registration. Also, the colleges are worried that exempt students will enroll in gateway courses for which they are not prepared and that, as a result, retention and graduation rates will suffer. Despite their concern, some colleges are excited about the flexibility they will have, moving forward: *"We have more flexibility in the use of factors other than one standardized test to advise and assist students. Use of meta majors will be beneficial to help guide students."* Other colleges state that K-12 schools have a critical role in helping high school graduates to be college-ready and that K-12 schools need to be held accountable for ensuring high school-college alignment. As previously noted, colleges are also increasing the support structures available to students who may be enrolled in courses that are too difficult. The main support structures detailed in the implementation plans are skill-building workshops, around the clock tutoring, and course-based help.

Theme 5: Colleges plan to offer a range of developmental education classes that employ different teaching strategies, but modularized and compressed formats are the most widely utilized.

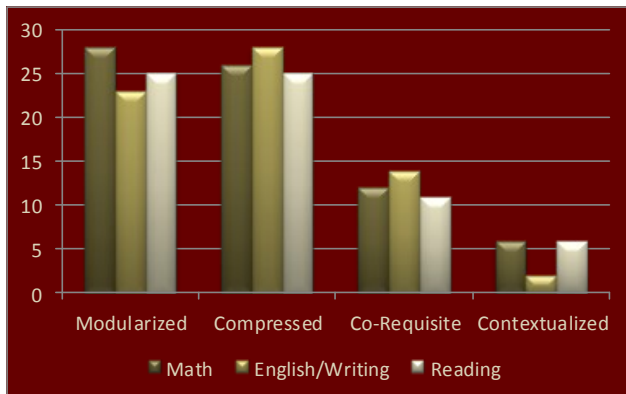


Figure 3. Developmental education course structures

Content analysis of the implementation plans overwhelmingly identified modularized and compressed instruction as the most favored approach for all colleges, with all 28 colleges applying these course strategies in at least one discipline. Co-requisite instruction is brought into the classroom by 17 of the 28 colleges, but with great variation across the colleges.

Contextualized instructional methods are the least favored, with only 7 colleges implementing them and doing so in a limited manner.

Figure 3 reflects the exact number of colleges implementing each of the strategies, separated out by academic discipline.

Theme 6: Colleges plan to utilize technology in the classroom, during the advising process, and for training staff members.

Table 1 provides information regarding the use of technology to support developmental education on campuses. Most respondents felt as though SB 1720 would increase the use of technology in developmental education, especially in modularized and compressed course structures. According to the implementation plans, many colleges rely on MyMathLab, MyWritingLab, MyReadingLab, ALEKS, adaptive learning software, and other computer-based programs to facilitate modularized instruction in particular. Technology-based instructional methods and software will also be used for some co-requisite courses.

In order to handle the increased advising load and the growing number of distance learners, the colleges report in their implementation plans that they will rely heavily on technology to supplement face-to-face advisement. Broward College's admissions website, for example, has new videos and written content to explain developmental education and gateway course options. At St. Petersburg College, "cyber advisors" monitor an email where students are able to ask questions about their exempt/non-exempt status. Similarly, Gulf Coast State College has e-learning advisors who work exclusively with online students who are unable to make an in-person visit to campus.

Table 1. Summary Statistics for the Use of Technology

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Will increase use of technology	--	12%	--	12%	24%	41%	11%
Will offer more online courses	6%	35%	18%	35%	--	6%	--
Will enhance online and distance learning curriculum	6%	18%	6%	24%	35%	11%	--
Will engage in Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)	12%	18%	--	35%	29%	--	6%
Students have access to computers/labs	--	--	6%	6%	12%	58%	18%
Students have sufficient computer/software knowledge	--	--	12%	--	53%	29%	6%
Computer labs have sufficient equipment for higher volume	--	6%	28%	12%	24%	24%	6%
Technology support is sufficient to handle technology increases	--	--	18%	18%	41%	24%	--

Theme 7: A number of colleges are skeptical as to whether the required changes will naturally result in increased student success.

When asked whether the changes resulting from SB 1720 would provide for enhanced opportunities, colleges responded with varying levels of certainty. Most colleges do agree that SB 1720 will provide for better collaboration, greater efficiency, and increased innovation across campus. The colleges expressed concern, however, about whether the reform would have a positive influence on students. Several colleges, for instance, did not believe that the reform would align courses to meet student needs (32%), increase student success (62%), or decrease student time in developmental education courses (24%) (see Table 2).

Table 2. Summary Statistics for Impact Estimates of the Reform

The changes resulting from Senate Bill 1720 will provide us with opportunities for...							
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Better collaboration within our college	--	--	5%	19%	38%	29%	9%
Greater efficiencies	--	10%	19%	14%	33%	19%	5%
Embracing innovation	5%	--	--	10%	33%	38%	14%
Aligning courses to meet student needs	--	14%	18%	10%	24%	24%	10%
Increasing student success	--	24%	38%	14%	14%	5%	5%
Decreasing student time in developmental education courses	--	14%	10%	24%	19%	19%	14%
Accelerating student enrollment in gateway courses	10%	5%	5%	13%	33%	19%	15%
Identifying students' academic needs	14%	19%	24%	--	24%	14%	5%
Improving advising and student progress monitoring	--	14%	14%	14%	20%	25%	14%
Providing necessary resources to students	5%	25%	14%	19%	19%	9%	9%

Discussion and Conclusions

In general, the colleges expressed that they understood the main requirements specified by SB 1720 and have formed cross-campus task forces to develop plans for executing the reform mandates. In most cases, these plans are in line with SB 1720 and research-based promising programs and practices. While opinions are divided on whether implementation of SB 1720 will provide opportunities for identification of student academic needs, necessary resources to struggling students, and increased student success, it is clear that nearly all colleges believe that the reform will increase collaboration, teamwork, and flexibility within the college and provide opportunity for greater innovation in developmental education. The developmental education reform has increased conversations across campuses and provided for a more unified, campus-wide, and planned approach for the future of developmental education. As for the campus leaders' concerns, future research focused on student outcomes could provide factual and credible evidence regarding whether or not SB 1720 is having a positive influence on student success.

This policy brief is based on the two research reports by the Florida Developmental Education Research Team at Florida State University (Hu, Park, Tandberg, Hankerson, Collins, & Nix, 2014; Hu, Tandberg, Park, Nix, Collins, & Hankerson, 2014). These reports can be found on the Florida State University College of Education website located at <http://coe.fsu.edu/Research/Latest-Research-Initiatives/FDERP/Publications>.

Resources

Hu, S., Park, T., Tandberg, D., Hankerson, D., Collins, R., & Nix, A. (2014). *Florida developmental education reform: Responses from the leaders of Florida College System institutions*. Tallahassee, FL: Center for Postsecondary Success.

Hu, S., Tandberg, D., Park, T., Nix, A., Collins, R., & Hankerson, D. (2014). *Florida developmental education reform: What do the Florida College System institutions plan to do?* Tallahassee, FL: Center for Postsecondary Success.

Office of Program Policy and Government Accountability. (2006). *Half of college students needing remediation drop out; Remediation completers do almost as well as other students* (Report 07-31). Tallahassee: Florida Legislature.



Center for Postsecondary Success

The mission of the *Center for Postsecondary Success* (CPS) is to provide support for, and foster collaboration among, those who are interested in conducting research on student success in postsecondary education, and to identify and evaluate institutional, state, and federal policies and programs that may serve to improve student success.

The overall goal of the CPS will be to foster a culture and create a structure where researchers, policy makers, and practitioners can come together to find solutions to address issues facing postsecondary success through rigorous and timely research and evidence-based policy and practice.