

Texas Community Colleges’ Developmental Education Mission

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ABSTRACT: *This article explores the developmental education missions of public Texas community colleges in response to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board’s mandated requirement to provide compensatory education. This descriptive qualitative study identified and coded Texas community colleges’ publicly stated developmental goals. The review of the literature illuminates the importance, organization, and challenges of post-secondary developmental education.*

Defining the missions of community colleges is a challenging endeavor since each college characterizes itself and defines its own purpose. “The most commonly accepted typology of missions is based primarily on curriculum” (Bailey & Morest, 2004, p. 5). These missions may include academic transfer, vocational-technical education, continuing education, developmental education, community service, and general education (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). However, these are only broad categories, and specific educational implementation may differ dramatically from one institution to another. As stated so frequently in the literature, the mission expansion of community colleges is a movement toward “being all things to all people.” Thomas Bailey, Director of Community College Research Center (CRCC), confirms that the trend is for colleges to increase the number of missions to which they are committed (Perin, 2002). So, why are colleges becoming increasingly comprehensive? Succinctly, the diversity of students’ educational goals is expanding the role that community colleges play in meeting the students’ and the community’s needs. These multifaceted missions emphasize the diversity of today’s community college function and their complex nature in terms of their constituents and stakeholders. Good intentions notwithstanding, two-year colleges need to solidify their goals based on strategic planning of all college missions with focus on core college functions with respect to their individual internal and external environments. Such environments may include, but are not limited to, economic, sociological, technical, and political forces. Furthermore, Townsend and Dougherty (2006) state that “changing demographic, economic, and social pressures repeatedly splinter and reform individual community colleges’ emphases on different institutional missions” (p. 1). In-

ternal environments, such as organizational design and performance must be understood in terms of the institution’s strengths and weaknesses to formulate strategies that support the missions (Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence, 1997). The purpose of this paper is to examine critically the Texas community college mission of developmental education with respect to mandated and publicly stated missions of curricular function; the developmental mission’s place among other college missions; the organizational approaches of mainstreaming vs. centralization; developmental education’s perceived negative view; and the positive outcome of developmental mission “buy-in.”

The Purpose of Community Colleges Defined by Texas Education Code

Texas Education Code §130.003(e) defines the purpose of public community colleges and mandates they provide technical programs up to two years in length leading to associate degrees or certificates; vocational programs leading directly to employment in semi skilled and skilled occupations; freshman and sophomore courses in arts and sciences; continuing adult education programs for occupational or cultural upgrading; compensatory education programs designed to fulfill the commitment of an admissions policy allowing the enrollment of disadvantaged students; a continuing program of counseling and guidance designed to assist students in achieving their individual educational goals; work force development programs designed to meet local and statewide needs; adult literacy and other basic skills programs for adults; and such other purposes as may be prescribed by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board or

local governing boards in the best interest of post-secondary education in Texas. (<http://tlo2.tlc.state.tx.us/statutes/docs/ED/content/htm/ed.003.00.000130.00.htm#130.003.00>)

Compensatory education, also known as developmental, remedial or preparatory education may be defined as courses in reading, writing, and mathematics for students lacking skills necessary to perform work at the level required by the institution (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). “Regardless of the name, courses that prepare students to enter college-level courses are an important part of community college’s offerings” (Vaughan, 2000, p. 10). Furthermore, due to open admissions policies and the increasing enrollments at community colleges, the need for developmental education to assist underprepared students is greater than ever. Post-secondary education is now essential for upgrading workforce skills and qualifications (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2007). Also, by successfully preparing students for college-level work, they have the opportunity to succeed in higher education and improve their quality of life through better employment and higher incomes.

Do Texas Community Colleges Publicly State Their Developmental Mission?

The preceding section quotes the Texas Education Code, but what about community colleges themselves? How do Texas community colleges characterize their mission, and do they publicly include developmental education? One way to “ascertain the community college’s missions . . . [is] to rely on public statements by authoritative policymakers and community college leaders” (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006, p. 6). To address these questions, I choose to review the online mission and purpose statements of the fifty Texas community college districts. I chose online missions and purpose statements to examine because they are easily accessible, and, following Hartley (2006), mission statements communicate the college’s function and willingness to serve. Furthermore, Evans (1990) states that college mission statements are guided by four areas: characteristics of students; characteristics of faculty; characteristics of setting; and characteristics of content. Based on the literature reviewed, mission statements characterize the significant operations of the community colleges.

Purpose Statement: The purpose of this descriptive study is to determine the percentage of mission or pur-

pose statements of Texas community college districts that specifically include developmental education.

Research Question: Do community college districts include developmental education in their college mission or purpose statements?

Assumption: Publicly stated goals are considered central by the institution.

Results: Appendix A lists the 50 Texas community college districts and the responses to the research question. Of the 50 districts, four districts’ mission and purpose statements were not available online. Of the community colleges, 69.6% include developmental education in their mission or purpose statements, and 30.4% did not.

Significance: The results of the data collected support the literature reviewed pertaining to the importance of the community colleges’ developmental mission as a curricular function. When characterized in mission and purpose statements, the curricular missions are “strategic expressions of institutional distinctiveness” (Morphew & Hartley, 2006, p. 459).

Developmental Education is Rarely an End to Itself

Developmental education is one of the central curricular functions of community colleges along with vocational or technical training, transfer preparation, continuing education, and community service (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; McCabe & Day, 1998; Merisotis & Phipps, 2000; Odenhoven, 2002; Spann, 2000). However, developmental education “differs fundamentally from these other curricular missions” (Kozeracki & Brooks, 2006, p. 63). Students primarily enroll in community colleges for transfer or vocational programs of study and rarely for the sole purpose of improving basic academic skills. For most students, the developmental mission supports the other student outcome curricular missions. As a supporting role, developmental missions should work in an inclusive way in terms of faculty, departments, and student integration into the college community. However, when community colleges identify the developmental mission as a separate college mission, curricular organization may lead to centralization of their developmental programs. The next section offers an explanation of developmental mainstreaming and centralization highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the potential effectiveness in terms of educational components.

Table 1. Relative potential effectiveness of centralized and mainstreamed structures.

Educational Component	Centralized Model	Mainstreamed Model
Quality of instruction	–	+
Ancillary support services	+	–
Teacher motivation and experiences	+	–
Student reactions	–	+
Reputation of developmental education	–	+

Source: Perin, 2002, p. 37.

Developmental Organizational Approaches: Mainstreaming vs. Centralization

Mainstreaming is the integration of development courses into regular departments; *centralization* is the locating of courses in separate organizational unity. The organization of developmental education is important for community colleges because it can have direct impact on the students' academic success. When developmental education is mainstreamed, developmental courses are offered in many academic departments, such as English or mathematics, whose main purpose is to offer college-level courses applicable to Associate's degrees or certificates. "Courses are numbered as part of a sequence that begins with noncredit, remedial-level instruction and continues through advanced associate-level preparation" (Perin, 2002, p.28). Instructors of the developmental courses are all considered faculty of the department and are paid through its budget (Perin, 2002). Working in close proximity in a departmental framework permits developmental education instructors to associate and collaborate with colleagues who teach college-level courses. Usually, faculty members teach both developmental and for-credit courses simultaneously. However, when developmental education is centralized, the developmental courses are offered in a separate department whose sole function is to offer pre-college-level courses. "Course numbers reflect the separateness of the department, and the faculty may communicate more often with each other than with

instructors from [other] academic departments" (Perin, 2002, p.28).

Based on Perin's (2002) review of the literature, Table 1 illustrates a summary comparing the two organizational approaches of mainstreaming and centralization in terms of critical education components.

The strengths of mainstreaming developmental education consist of *quality of instruction*, *student reactions*, and *reputation of development education*. *Quality of instruction* is assessed in terms of its alignment with the college level curriculum. "From a cognitive perspective, close alignment of developmental and college-level instruction should promote students' generalization of learning beyond remediation to the college-level classroom" (Perin, 2002, p.32). Furthermore, *student reactions* refer to the shame attached to developmental education. Although, the *reputation of developmental education* in academic departments may be unfavorable "centralizing remediation may be worse by stigmatizing remediation in the whole college" (Perin, 2002, p. 37).

Kozeracki and Brooks' (2006) article addresses the issue that developmental education is a "collegewide responsibility that needs to be fully integrated with the college's broader curriculum and varied missions" (p.63). The authors' focus on the structure of community college developmental education programs, their evolving role within the curriculum, and strategies to foster student success. With approximately 98–100% of surveyed community colleges offering developmental courses and more than 40% of entering freshman taking at least one developmental course, this definitely supports the developmental mission of colleges (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Students take developmental courses to move to college-level courses where they can transfer to 4-year colleges and receive Associate's or vocational degrees. With such potential benefits to students and society as a whole, the evidence suggests that college administrators, faculty members from all disciplines, and supporting personnel should structure and support developmental education programs by working together with a mainstream approach to help underprepared incoming students succeed.

The Perceived Negative View of Developmental Education

From a policy perspective, Merisotis and Phipps (2000) address the "increased scrutiny... [of] offering coursework below college level in higher education institutions"

(p.67). Many state legislators are attempting to limit remediation courses, or, similar to Florida, move nearly all remediation to community colleges. Additionally, some states register concerns over using tax dollars to fund college courses that should be taught in high school. Based on a survey of state legislators, “there is little consensus and understanding about what developmental education is, whom it serves, and who should provide it, and how much it costs” (p.68). The intent of the article is to clarify policy discussions by addressing developmental education’s core function, its “current status” at the college level, the costs of not providing developmental education, and recommendations “intended to reduce the need for remediation while also enhancing its effectiveness” (p.68).

Conversely, Hawthorne (1997) makes the case that “the students who come to an institution shape its curriculum . . . [and] institutions develop special curriculum to serve selected student groups” (i.e. remediation) (p.34). Students who take developmental courses are not outliers but are a significant part of the student population, and as such, college curriculum should reflect developmental education as a significant, inclusive component. Developmental education does not lower the academic integrity of the institution, but rather supports student access to higher education. State education codes and colleges set the standards for college-level classes, and the aim of the developmental mission is to bring students up to that level.

The Developmental Learning Environment

Grubb and Cox (2005) affirm that there has not been adequate improvement in the learning environment of developmental education at community colleges. Due to the increasing amount of students entering higher education underprepared for college-level courses, developmental education “is one of the most difficult challenges our entire education system has to face” (p.102). Student drop-out rates and dissatisfaction in developmental courses is high. Additionally, students who take developmental coursework complete their programs slower than students who do not take developmental courses. Grubb and Cox (2005) identify four elements that “contribute to a classroom’s success or failure as a learning environment: student needs, instructor approach, course content, and institutional setting” (p.93). By “aligning” the sequence of developmental courses and college-level courses, the curricular coherence will be improved. Additionally, by requiring the participation of all faculty, those teaching developmental and college-level courses, the “trajectory”

of developmental learning outcomes may meet college-level entrance expectations.

An Innovative Example of Developmental Mission “Buy-in”

Raferly’s (2005) article is based on a case study of Metropolitan Community College’s (MCC) implementation of an innovative developmental learning community initiative named the Academic Improvement for Success program (AIM). AIM is intended to provide “assistance to students with multiple academic deficiencies by offering a level of support beyond what a student taking stand-alone developmental course receives” (Raferly, 2005, p. 64). The advantages of AIM include block scheduling to facilitate student cohort groups of students who enroll in two or more developmental courses; academic and counseling support services; diagnostic testing (placement testing is not mandatory); extracurricular activities; and partnerships by faculty and counselor teams who meet regularly to discuss individual student progress.

The most significant component in the program’s success is the support of AIM by faculty and the college’s support to faculty. The main goal of the program is designed to help students improve basic skills, expand valuable learning strategies, and foster students’ self confidence through a supportive learning community. The college’s leadership maintains the commitment to ensure that faculty and instructors are aware of the needs of developmental students by providing faculty and staff with professional development, top-level administrator support, and monetary stipends to “acknowledge the extra time and effort required to develop a new interdisciplinary learning experience for students” (Raferly, 2005, p.65).

Conclusion

Developmental education is one of the most important programs that community colleges offer since it directly supports the cornerstone of their mission—access and comprehensiveness (Vaughan, 2005). Currently, more than 40% of all students entering community college enroll in at least one developmental course (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). With enrollments continuing to expand and increasing by access to more diverse populations, the need for developmental education will continue to grow. Developmental courses require more personal support and resources than standard college-

level courses, and unfortunately, developmental programs are frequently given low priority by both legislatures and colleges and are typically underfunded by both. McCabe (2001) fittingly states, "Our nation's future depends upon everyone recognizing the importance of developmental education and raising it to the priority it needs and deserves. America has no one to waste" (p. 6).

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Appendix A. Percentages of Texas Community College Districts that include developmental education in their mission or purpose statement.

Community College	Yes	No	N/A
Alamo Colleges	•		
Northeast Lakeview College			
Northwest Vista College			
Palo Alto College			
San Antonio College			
St. Philip's College			
Alvin Community College			•
Amarillo College		•	
Angelina College	•		
Austin Community College		•	
Blinn College	•		
Brazosport College		•	
Central Texas College	•		
Cisco Junior College	•		
Clarendon College	•		
Coastal Bend College	•		
College of the Mainland	•		
Collin County Community College	•		
Dallas County Community College District	•		
Brookhaven College			
Cedar Valley College			
Eastfield College			
El Centro College			
Mountain View College			
North Lake College			
Richland College			
Del Mar College	•		
El Paso Community College		•	
Frank Phillips College	•		
Galveston College			•
Grayson County College	•		
Hill College		•	
Houston Community College System	•		
Howard College		•	
Kilgore College		•	
Laredo Community College		•	
Lee College		•	
McLennan Community College		•	
Midland College	•		

Community College	Yes	No	N/A
Navarro College	•		
North Central Texas College	•		
Lone Star College System	•		
Cy-Fair College			
Kingwood College			
Montgomery College			
North Harris College			
Tomball College			
Northeast Texas Community College	•		
Odessa College	•		
Panola College	•		
Paris Junior College			•
Ranger College	•		
San Jacinto College (District)	•		
Central Campus			
North Campus			
South Campus			
South Plains College	•		
South Texas College	•		
Southwest Texas Junior College (District)	•		
Tarrant County College		•	
Northeast Campus			
Northwest Campus			
South Campus			
Southeast Campus			
Temple College	•		
Texarkana College			•
Texas Southmost College		•	
Trinity Valley Community College		•	
Tyler Junior College	•		
Vernon College	•		
(The) Victoria College	•		
Weatherford College		•	
Western Texas College	•		
Wharton County Junior College	•		
Total (50 community college districts)	32 (Y)	14 (N)	4
% of CC district from the available Web sites	69.6	30.4	

Source: Texas Community College Districts' list retrieved from the Texas Association of Community Colleges from <http://www.tacc.org/>