Introduction

For most community college students, developmental courses are a part of the college experience. For many different reasons, these students come to college unprepared to succeed in college-level coursework. To prepare students to succeed at the college level, a series of developmental education courses in math, English, and reading have been created at TCC. How effective these developmental sequences are, however, is unclear. This Brief will look at the experiences of students in the Achieving the Dream cohorts as they navigated through the developmental course sequences at the college. Specifically, the Brief will focus on data from the 2003 Achieving the Dream cohort, which provides a three-year period of time to track the movement of students from developmental coursework into college-level classes.

TERMINOLOGY

DEVELOPMENTAL SEQUENCES: The order of remedial courses in math, English, and reading a student is required to take before enrolling in college-level coursework.

ACHIEVING THE DREAM COHORTS: All degree/certificate seeking undergraduate students (full- and part-time) who entered TCC for the first time during the 2003 Fall quarter (2003 Cohort), the 2004 Fall quarter (2004 Cohort), and the 2005 Fall quarter (2005 cohort)

When Students Take Developmental Courses

It is has been assumed that students put off taking developmental courses as long as possible. Interestingly, most students in the 2003 Achieving the Dream cohort enrolled in developmental courses during their first year: in fact, students took 80% of all developmental math classes, 90% of developmental English classes, and 86% of developmental reading classes during their first year at TCC.
Transition Through Developmental Coursework

Where a student starts in the developmental course sequence strongly impacts the students’ chances of moving into college-level coursework. The more developmental classes a student has to take, the chance of enrolling in college-level coursework goes down significantly. This is especially true of students beginning three levels or more below college-level in math (Math088 and Math086). For example, while 56% of students in the Achieving the Dream 2003 cohort who began in Math097 or Math099, and 43% of students who started at Math090, enrolled in a college-level math course within three years, less than 15% of the students who began in Math088 or Math086 enrolled in a college-level math course within the same time period. A similar pattern existed for the developmental English and reading sequences at two levels below and one level below college level (English090/091, Reading092/093).

Figure RB6.02: 2003 Cohort Transition in Developmental Math
Repeating Developmental Courses

One measure of students’ inability to move through developmental education course sequences is the number of times a course is repeated. Of all developmental coursework, students were most likely to repeat courses in math, especially Math090 and Math099. One quarter of all students in the 2003 Achieving the Dream cohort enrolled in Math090 two or more times, and 22% of the same students enrolled in Math099 two or more times within a three-year period. Meanwhile, 10% of these students repeated a developmental English course and 7% repeated a developmental reading course. Overall, most students didn’t repeat developmental coursework, despite the fact that so few students eventually enrolled in college-level work.

Figure RB6.03: 2003 Cohort Repetition of Developmental Courses

Conclusion

For many students, enrolling in developmental education courses at TCC signals the end of their academic careers. This is especially true for the most underprepared students—students who start at three levels or below in the developmental sequences. Hopefully, these data will better help us understand how we can adapt developmental coursework at TCC to accomplish what it is meant to do: help students become prepared to succeed in learning at the college level.