Have the Implemented Recommendations of the ELA Task Force Improved Student Success and
Time to Completion at Sauk Valley Community College?

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Developmental, or remedial, education—in which incoming college students deemed to be not college-ready (usually in mathematics and/or language arts) are remediated—has long been a difficulty for colleges and community colleges in particular. In recent years, however, there has been an explosion of new research and techniques related to developmental education.

Specifically at Sauk Valley Community College (SVCC), much attention has been given to the issue of developmental education, specifically in the area of English language arts (ELA). During the summer of 2013, a task force was assembled to study and recommend changes to ELA developmental education at SVCC. Research-based policy changes were implemented in the fall semester of 2014, however to date no formal study has been completed regarding the effectiveness of those changes.

Review of Literature

Student Success in Traditional Developmental Education

The literature raises many concerns about the negative impact of traditional developmental education on student success. Scott-Clayton (2012) found that placement exams are better at predicting which students will succeed in college than who would fail and that multiple methods of placement would be more effective and could help more students be successful. Once a student has been placed into a developmental course, Park et al. (2016) found that taking developmental education classes has a significant impact on degree and career completion and that many students simply do not ever take the core or gateway classes. In fact, less than half of the students complete their developmental education series of courses, and nearly one third simply do not take the developmental education course at all (Bailey, Jeong, &

Cho, 2010). Hu et al. (2016) determined that developmental education acts more as a hindrance than a help to incoming college students. Even new first year experience courses were found to not help students move through developmental education faster or improve academic achievement (What Works Clearinghouse (ED) & Development Services Group, 2016). Nunez (2015) found this to be true at SVCC as well; fewer than half of students are successful in developmental education courses the first time, and only half will continue as students past the first year.

English Language Arts Developmental Education

These trends apply to English Language Arts (ELA) as well. For example, at the Community College of Baltimore County, only 52.6% of students enrolled in the highest developmental English course ever attempted ENGL101, the gateway English course, and only 38.5% completed. Only 22.1% attempted ENGL102 and 16.8% completed (Cho, Kopko, Jenkins, & Jaggars, 2012). These results are compatible with the national average for ELA success rates of 22% (Complete College America, n.d.).

Trends in Developmental Education

Despite the bleak outlook on traditional developmental education, there is much activity around alternative approaches for developmental education, many of which are summarized by the Core Principles for Transforming Remedial Education: A Joint Statement (Charles A. Dana Center, Complete College America, Education Commission of the States, & Jobs for the Future, 2012), credited for being the impetus behind (Waschull, 2018) Florida's 2013 developmental education reform measures—which made placement tests optional for high school graduates and required measures for developing corequisite support classes (Venezia & Hughes, 2013)—among others. As a result of those reform measures, Hu et al. (2016) found that fewer students

took developmental education courses but more passed them and that while more students both took and failed gateway courses, the ratio of all first-time college students who passed gateway courses increased dramatically.

SVCC English Task Force Recommendations

Prompted by these and other studies, a task force was assembled at SVCC to study potential changes to their ELA developmental education program (Eichman, Hamilton, Matheney, Pfeifer, & Tavitas, 2013). The task force's recommendations can be summarized as the following: shortened sequences for developmental ELA courses, corequisite options, and adjustments to placement requirements.

Shortened Sequences. Based in part on Sheldon and Durdella's (2010) study showing that compressed (8-week) developmental courses were more effective than traditional 16-week courses, the task force recommended offering 8-week ELA courses combining both reading and writing courses which had previously been separate developmental courses of study.

Corequisite Options. There is a preponderance of evidence that corequisite options have increased success compared to traditional developmental education sequences. In the Baltimore example mentioned earlier, under the accelerated learning program (ALP), all students attempted ENGL 101, and the overall completion rate rose from 38.5% to 74.7%, while the ENGL102 completion rate rose from 16.8% to 37.5% (Cho et al., 2012), which was consistent with the initial results (Jenkins, Speroni, Belfield, Jaggars, & Edgecombe, 2010). These examples are hardly anomalies; results from several states show that states following a corequisite model see English gateway course success rates of double to triple the national average success rate of 22% (Complete College America, n.d.). The SVCC ELA Task Force recommended that courses be classified as requiring ENG 101 placement as a prerequisite, corequisite (ENG 101 + ELA 090),

or no ELA placement required. While the national data is clear that corequisites are generally more effective than traditional prerequisite options, more research is needed to determine whether the same is true at SVCC and, if so, whether the current ELA corequisite model should be expanded.

Adjustments to Placement Requirements. Much research has been performed regarding the accuracy of various placement requirements. The SVCC ELA Task Force focused on eliminating the reading placement in favor of just the writing placement. In addition, they recommended a placement test that included a writing sample as being more a more accurate placement mechanism. The research is not clear on this point, however. Sullivan and Nielsen (2009) determined that ACCUPLACER results are as accurate as an essay for placement, whereas the New Mexico English Remediation Taskforce (*New Mexico English remediation taskforce report*, 2016) asserted that essays are a much preferred assessment of a student's ability. More research is needed to determine what are the best method(s) of placement at SVCC specifically.

Discussion

While the SVCC ELA Task Force's recommendations are compatible with the literature, the results of the 2014 policy changes need to be studied to determine whether they have been successful within the context of Sauk Valley Community College specifically. In addition, more detailed study of the results will bring to light additional trials, for example, expanded corequisite options, different and more accurate placement options, and more effective developmental sequencing options.

The researcher proposes to study the effect the SVCC ELA Task Force's implemented recommendations have made on student success and completion times including but not limited

to, student retention rates, pass rates for ENG 101 (the ELA gateway course), and program

completion rates for cohorts from the fall 2010 semester through the spring 2018 semester. Data

will be obtained from the College's student information system and/or learning management

system, as appropriate.

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