



Westmoreland County Community College

ATD *Info Brief*

March 2015

College Literacy

Beginning with the fall 2015 semester, important changes to developmental education will be implemented at WCCC. Based on practices pioneered at Community College of Baltimore County that eventually became the nationally recognized Accelerated Learning Program, WCCC will be offering two four-credit reading and writing courses called ENG 085-College Literacy I and ENG 095-College Literacy II. This reduces the number of distinct developmental courses in reading and writing from four to two and streamlines the developmental pathway. In addition to streamlining, WCCC will strengthen developmental reading and writing by tightly integrating the developmental curriculum with what is taught in the gateway English course, ENG 161-College Writing. Also, students who place into ENG 095-College Literacy II will be simultaneously enrolled in ENG 161-College Writing. This will allow the majority of new WCCC students to take a crucial college-level course in their first semester and earn more credits toward graduation sooner.

For those testing into ENG 095/ENG 161, English will be a major focus during their first semester with seven credits devoted to the discipline. However, we know from our own pilot projects that students who concurrently enroll in ENG 161-College Writing and ENG 070-Intermediate Writing usually earn higher grades than those who test directly into College Writing. With the inclusion of critical reading skills in the College Writing curriculum, the integration of reading and writing into a co-curricular support course will be even more effective. The skills students attain in ENG 161-College Writing will form a strong foundation for the rest of their college and professional careers.

Background

As a major departure from previous practices, a little background on what WCCC has been doing up to now will help contextualize the new approach. According to the Community College Research Center at the Teachers College of Columbia University, a study of over 250,000 students at 57 Achieving the Dream community colleges showed that 33% tested into developmental reading (Bailey, Jeong & Cho, 2008). At WCCC, during the three academic years from 2011 through 2013, about 51% of students were referred to developmental reading. In order to discount the notion that perhaps there is something wrong with the educational preparation of our incoming students, note that Pennsylvania ranks slightly above average among states with 70% or more participation on the SAT (Wanner, 2014). Clearly Westmoreland County's students are capable of high academic achievement. With the new curriculum and placement approach, it is projected that the number of people WCCC refers to developmental reading/writing will drop to around 41% in the first year with a significant proportion of those students concurrently enrolled in ENG 161-College Writing.



FAQs

What will happen to students who are already in the developmental sequence?

Those who complete RDG 080 and/or ENG 070 successfully prior to fall 2015 will, as usual, be ready for ENG 161. Those who complete RDG 050 and/or ENG 030 prior to the fall semester will take ENG 095/ENG 161. Those who were not successful in RDG 050 or ENG 030 will take ENG 085. If a student has completed ENG 070 but not RDG 080 (or vice versa) they will be given the opportunity either to retake the placement test and test out College Literacy or to sign up for ENG 095/ENG 161.

Can a student take ENG 095 by itself?

No. The idea is to move students along toward completion of a degree or certificate sooner. ENG 095 is designed to support students while they are taking ENG 161. If a student is reluctant to commit to the ENG 095/ENG 161 combination, they can sign up for ENG 085.

How do you know this will work?

In addition to our own internal pilot studies, a study cited by the CCRC indicates, "Students in accelerated English developmental education accrued more college-level credits within one and three years than students in the traditional sequence," (Jaggars, Edgecombe, & Stacey, 2014). The traditional sequence at WCCC used to put off the gateway English course up to an academic year or more for many of our students. Given what we know about WCCC's fall-to-fall retention rates, many people never made it that far. The new sequence puts ENG 161-College Writing into most students' schedules within their first two semesters.

Can students retake the placement test after completing ENG 085?

No. Students who pass ENG 085 with an A can take ENG 161 in the subsequent semester. Those who pass with a B or C can take ENG 095/ENG 161 subsequently. Those who earn less than a C must retake ENG 085.

What will happen if a student passes ENG 161 but does not pass ENG 095?

This is unlikely to occur since sections will be linked and in many cases taught by the same instructor. The ENG 161 grade will include weighting for the grade in ENG 095. In cases where they are not taught by the same instructor there will be robust communication between both instructors.

Where can I learn more about the Accelerated Learning Program?

The Accelerated Learning Program hosts its website at <http://alp-deved.org/>.

Where can I read more about research on community colleges?

The Community College Research Center of the Teachers College of Columbia University hosts its community college FAQ page at <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Community-College-FAQs.html>.

For more information, contact Dr. Andrew Barnette at barnettea@wccc.edu.

References

Bailey, Jeong & Cho. (2008). Referral, Enrollment, and Completion in Developmental Education Sequences in Community Colleges. Retrieved from Community College Research Center: <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/referral-enrollment-completion-developmental-education.html>

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