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## TENNESSEE DEVELOPMENTAL STUDIES REDESIGN

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Tennessee's efforts to redesign its developmental studies courses came from a realization that there were two major leaks in the pipeline leading to college access and preparation. Representing different sides of the same coin, students were either not graduating from high school or were doing so not fully prepared for college-level coursework. Both of these problems led to significant costs to the K-12 and postsecondary systems as well as the students in those systems. Recognizing that it could play a unique role in helping to address these issues, the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) set out to change some fundamental programs and policies, including a full scale effort to examine and redesign how the Regents' colleges and universities delivered developmental courses to students. The early challenges and successes of the Developmental Studies Redesign initiative provide an example of how governance, commitment and innovation can impact the preparation of students for college.

### Setting the Table for Reform

Tennessee's commitment to reform for improved preparation and access to college is well established and has been a focus at all levels of governance throughout the K-12 and postsecondary systems. In 2002, TBR issued a report titled *Defining our Future* ([http://fp.tbr.edu/press\\_releases/future/accountability.pdf](http://fp.tbr.edu/press_releases/future/accountability.pdf)) approving a series of recommendations and policy changes to address how TBR institutions would respond to declining state funds. TBR further defined its vision for the system's colleges and universities through its *Vision of Excellence* ([http://www.tntech.edu/research/pdf/Vision\\_Abridged.pdf](http://www.tntech.edu/research/pdf/Vision_Abridged.pdf)) and subsequent *Strategic Plan for 2005-2010* ([www.tbr.edu/WorkArea/linkit.aspx?LinkIdentifier=id&ItemID=3844](http://www.tbr.edu/WorkArea/linkit.aspx?LinkIdentifier=id&ItemID=3844)) establishing goals and benchmarks through the 2010 school year aimed at providing "a quality education that is accessible and affordable to all Tennesseans." As a result of this focus, the board identified four priority areas: leadership, access to learning, quality, and resourcefulness.

Commitment to the college and career ready agenda was also demonstrated at the highest level when the Governor in 2005 issued a challenge to the K-12 and postsecondary systems to increase high school graduation and rigor, leading to better preparation for, access to, and persistence in college. To help advance these efforts, in 2007 Tennessee joined Achieve's American Diploma Project (<http://www.achieve.org/node/604>) to increase the rigor of the state's high school requirements and align standards with college and work-ready expectations. Collectively, these efforts have set the table for reform.

## Recognizing TBRs Role in Reform

With the role of establishing and coordinating policies across all 45 of its institutions, the governance structure in Tennessee gave TBR a unique role to play in efforts of postsecondary preparation, access and persistence. Further, while regulatory authority over developmental studies varies across states, in Tennessee, this authority lies with the TBR. Recognizing its role, TBR took the reins and began to implement reform.

While the governance structure in Tennessee allowed TBR to play a central role in this effort, based on the experience of efforts we can identify common critical common critical elements to success that can be applied regardless of where authority lies. These components are:

- Leadership (at the state, system or institutional level) to push the agenda and commit to getting it done,
- Empowering broad based action through a mechanism or model (i.e., National Center for Academic Transformation (NCAT), DSP Task Force, etc.); and
- Commitment of needed resources that provides not only financial support but encouragement by recognizing progress.

States with different structures can still learn important lessons from Tennessee's redesign efforts and adapt their initiatives to meet the states' needs.

## Out with the Old, in with the New

Getting started on the journey to redesign developmental studies courses began with TBR's *Strategic Plan*. Specifically, the plan listed as an objective the need to **"increase speed and access of remedial/developmental work for students requiring them to become college-ready."** In 2005, TBR built upon the impetus for the need to redesign its developmental studies programs when it released a policy brief indicating sixty percent of students required at least one developmental studies course. This was well beyond the national average of twenty-eight percent. In addition, the problem in Tennessee was even more profound at two-year community colleges where seventy-four percent required some level of developmental education. The state paid for these gaps in education - upwards of \$25 million per year. Students also felt very real costs, spending anywhere from an additional \$1300 to \$4100 in tuition on developmental studies courses.

After examining the reasons for disconnects to college access and preparation, TBR decided that the solution required a two pronged approach. Access and preparation began in the high school, but did not end there. While the overarching goal was to reduce the number of students that required remediation by sealing the gaps between the K-12 and postsecondary systems, the need for developmental education could not in reality be completely eliminated. Recognizing this, TBR expanded its reform focus to include developmental education and set out to ensure that the systems colleges and universities were delivering high quality developmental education courses in a manner that reduced costs and increased student preparation. The aim of this new endeavor was to examine the quality of its systems' developmental courses, including their alignment to college standards, as well as the method of delivery for the courses.

## DSP Redesign Task Force

To achieve its objective, TBR established, in 2006, a DSP Redesign Task Force (DSP Task Force, <http://tnredesign.org/>) comprised of system administrators and campus faculty and administrators with a goal to:

***“Establish a best practice, system wide, community-college-based remedial/developmental program that is substantially technology driven, composed of language arts and mathematics, and allows students to identify and focus on the academic areas where they are deficient.” (TBR Strategic Plan, Strategy A8)***

The DSP Task Force also consists of four subcommittees staffed with faculty content experts, Tennessee State Department of Education consultants (primarily in math and English), campus and system representatives with expertise in assessment and placement, and chief financial officers and financial aid officers from the campuses and system CFO.

The DSP Task Force started by analyzing the delivery of its institutions’ developmental education programs against typical barriers to success. After spending six months examining nearly every element that could impact remedial education programs - from the problem of having little data about what works to attendance patterns and financial aid structures – the DSP Task Force came up with two general conclusions:

- Courses were being taught nearly the same way as they were 20 years earlier; and
- The placement model (students were placed into one of three levels - basic remedial; basic developmental; or intermediate developmental) did not focus on students’ actual deficiencies – course content was universal and did not allow for acceleration that would move students onto college level coursework in a timely fashion.

Knowing these two general factors, TBR had a starting point for redesign – find better ways to assign students to, and new ways to teach, developmental studies coursework. From this, the DSP Task Force reached consensus on a new philosophy for delivery of developmental studies courses:

- ***Change of focus from the past—to the future*** - Remediate for whatever is needed to prepare the student to succeed in the curriculum of their chosen field of study. If the student changes the career goal, additional remediation may be needed.
- ***Focus on the strengths of the students*** while addressing their weaknesses - Can remediation be provided “just in time” so that students can take college level courses prior to completing all developmental studies requirements?

## Partnerships

Partnering with the Education Commission of the States (ECS, <http://www.ecs.org/>), in 2006 TBR applied for and received a three-year grant through the U.S. Department of Education’s Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE). The stated goal of this grant is “to broaden access and success, and create a more affordable system of higher education for students by developing and implementing a more efficient delivery and assessment system to ensure college readiness through a comprehensive design of Tennessee Board of Regents developmental studies programs.” While TBR was committed to the redesign of its programs with or without the FIPSE grant, receiving the grant

allowed TBR to partner with the National Center for Academic Transformation (NCAT, <http://www.center.rpi.edu/index.html>) to help guide the implementation of course redesign through six Tennessee higher education institutions. Understanding the importance of program evaluation and using the money provided by the grant, TBR has also partnered with the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS, <http://www.nchems.org>) to conduct the external evaluation of the project.

## **Innovation & Transformation**

Knowing that it was important to the success of the initiative, TBR came to the project with no pre-conceived answers – only to approach this project with an open mind, to think outside of the box and to base recommendations on data-driven decisions. As a result, TBR considered every element of its programs to be on the table. This includes the concept of courses, assessments, diagnostics, placement, delivery methods, funding models and more.

Through the grant, TBR has been able to fund pilot programs at six institutions, though TBR required all its universities and community colleges to complete the NCAT Readiness Criteria (please visit: <http://www.center.rpi.edu/RedesignAlliance/C2R/C2RAppGuide.htm#App>). The funded pilots, now in the second phase of implementation, focus on developmental math, reading and English. There are six principles that guide each of the projects:

1. Ensure the pilot projects are scalable & replicable for delivery in multiple settings
2. Increase the quality of learning and assessment
3. Lead to significant cost savings (from institution to student)
4. Streamline the amount of time a student takes to complete degree program
5. Maintain commitment to access
6. Sustain the program with budgetary commitment and public support

Beyond the actual redesign of developmental courses, TBR is also using the project to leverage efforts in K-12 and postsecondary education to both better prepare students for college and provide them with the support they need once they arrive. Through committees of 7-9 college faculty the redesign aims to align the developmental studies curriculum with high school and college level curriculum. The project has also been used to evaluate current assessment policies and tools to ensure improved placement of students and measurement of impact of developmental studies efforts. Finally, to the degree possible, TBR is looking across initiatives to better integrate the developmental studies redesign project with other state P-16 efforts like Tennessee’s participation in the American Diploma Project as a way to ensure that both the high school curriculum and developmental education requirements are aligned to the same standards – preparing students for college-level work.

## **Understanding Results**

With commitment to data and ensuring that projects can be replicated across institutions, TBR is dedicated to evaluating its projects at each phase. The initial results of the first six pilot projects were mixed. With the exception of all but one, the projects focusing on developmental mathematics education have had positive results. Some specific highlights include Austin Peay University where “just in time” remediation for college level courses has led to significant improvement in student learning (*for more information see:*

[http://www.center.rpi.edu/States/TN/Abstracts/APSU%20Algebra\\_Abstract.htm](http://www.center.rpi.edu/States/TN/Abstracts/APSU%20Algebra_Abstract.htm)). Even more promising is the work at Cleveland State Community College (CSCC) which has expanded from two courses at one campus to six courses at three campuses. After redesigning three developmental math courses the impacts began to show immediately, including a 20 percentage point jump in completion rates in Intermediate Algebra and a nearly 50 percent increase in the number of students exiting developmental math program; not to mention an immediate impact on cost with annual savings of \$50,000. As a result of its success, CSCC received the 2009 Bellwether Award by the Community College Futures Assembly (<http://www.tbr.state.tn.us/news/default.aspx?id=5402>, and <http://www.coe.ufl.edu/futures/bellwether.html>).

While TBR is excited about the positive results seen in several of its pilots, the project partners are working to revise plans for those pilots that did not have initial positive results. In some cases, there was limited data; in others certain aspects of the initial plan were not followed.

Regardless of the initial success for each of the pilots, some overall lessons have been learned that will provide value to the system as the efforts evolve and expand to more campuses. Perhaps the most notable lesson learned is that it is hard for faculty to “let go” of delivering content face to face and to understand that technology can many times help students develop the skills more effectively and efficiently. However, once the changes were accepted, the pilot projects have reported increased student and faculty engagement, more flexible scheduling, a greater focus on individual needs of students, as well as improved attitudes among faculty and students toward the use of technology for instruction. Another key take-away from this project is the critical need for historical data and better data systems to benchmark current effectiveness of TBR’s redesign efforts. A useful illustration is the fact that four out of the six pilots needed to identify a new registration process and track student data manually because the new data management system could not accommodate all the needs.

### **The Next Phase**

As the project nears its conclusion in December 2009, TBR will be using the data and lessons learned to expand redesign to all of its institutions. New program guidelines, based on the redesign study, will be codified into Tennessee Board of Regent policy. All institutions will be required to meet the guidelines for developmental programs. The guidelines will provide a framework that allows various models to be used but accountability measures will require benchmarks so that continuous improvement will be fostered within program design. The needed commitment to this system wide reform goes beyond TBR and directly to the institutions. The Chief Academic Officers at the 19 TBR institutions have pledged their support, and some have already provided financial support at non-funded institutions for faculty to begin approved redesign efforts separate from the pilot programs.

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### **Advice to Higher Education**

For those seeking to improve P-16 alignment and increase opportunities for all students to attend college, Tennessee offers the following key take-a-ways:

- *Leadership Matters*: Regardless of a state's system of governance, the college-ready agenda requires leadership to push the agenda and commit to getting it done. Leaders come from the ranks of faculty and the community. Not just the usual places.
- *Don't Do It Alone*: Creating and sustaining partnerships, whether within the university or K-12 system, or with outside organizations, is key to successful implementation. Making the pieces of teacher training, curriculum, assessment and instruction work together.
- *Data matter*: Establishing a commitment to data will allow for continual assessment and ultimately lead to more successful programs and policies.

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