

Summary of the Developmental Education/Placement AQIP Team's Work  
May 2010-January 2011  
For MCC Executive Committee Presentation

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**Team Members:**

Gail Knapp, Co-Chair (Social Sciences Faculty and CPSC Vice-President)  
Julie Steffey, Co-Chair (Developmental Writing Coordinator/English Faculty)  
Paula Weston, English Faculty (Writing)  
Parmis Johnson, English Faculty (Reading)  
Patricia Bergh, Dean of Humanities  
Bernard Cunningham, Mathematics Faculty  
Rose Beane, Director, Learning Center and DisAbilities Services  
Janet Westhoff, Nursing Coordinator/Nursing Faculty  
Brian Feige, Science Faculty  
Lisa Banks, Business Faculty  
Virginia Rucks, Transfer Counselor, Counseling and Student Development

Sponsor: Amy Fugate, Vice-President for Academic Affairs

**May-December 2010:**

1. After an orientation to the AQIP and Action Project Process provided by the Executive Dean of Planning, Research, and Quality, Steve Robinson, the team created a project charter (approved by the team on October 1) and secured support for that charter from the project sponsor (Vice-President for Academic Affairs, Dr. Amy Fugate), who secured support from the MCC Board of Trustees. The charter statement includes:
  - a. The project description from the AQIP Action Project Directory, which outlines our overall goal and focus
  - b. The business case, which presents the rationale for this project, what will happen if no action is taken, and an estimation of time needed
  - c. Problem/opportunity/goal statements
  - d. Scope/constraints/assumptions statements
  - e. Team guidelines
  - f. Team membership
  - g. Preliminary project plan
  - h. Identification of important stakeholders
2. Team members began reading articles related to academic preparedness and developmental education.
3. In a series of several two-hour meetings, the team heard reports on, and asked questions about, the current status of MCC advising and new student placement (Virginia Rucks), Learning Center services (Rose Beane), developmental mathematics (Bernard Cunningham), developmental reading (Parmis Johnson and Patricia Bergh), and developmental writing (Julie Steffey, Paula Weston, and Patricia Bergh). The team also discussed issues of student academic preparedness

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and the connection between MCC's open admissions policy and a number of students who may not be ready or able to succeed in any community college course.

4. Representatives from the existing developmental programs (mathematics, reading, and writing) presented data on their programs including:
  - a. Student placement/recommendation into the courses and any subsequent processes for re-assessing student skills and moving students into courses more suited to their abilities
  - b. Course descriptions and learning objectives
  - c. Master course outlines/curriculum for each developmental course
  - d. Final assessments or other significant assessments in each course
  - e. Available tutoring or other academic support within subject areas
  - f. How students move up to the next developmental level or college-level course in each area
  - g. How student success is tracked within developmental programs
  - h. For the years 2007-2009 in each area, how many developmental courses ran, how many students were served, and how many teachers (full-time vs. part-time) taught. Patricia Bergh also provided data from 2000 to show the dramatic increase in developmental reading and writing course numbers over the past decade)

(Documents presented and discussed by the team are available on the College's AQIP page)

**October 2010-January 2011:**

1. The team is beginning to bridge the gap between steps two and three of the PDCA Cycle: "Define the Current Situation" and "Analyze the Current Situation." On January 5 the team began talking about gaps in the information gathered so far and to review the developmental student success funnel report from the ATD Data Team.
  - a. The success funnel analysis highlighted some problems that the team had noted, earlier, as well as some new issues:
    - i. The developmental reading and writing programs' student records (from placement through final grade and overall progress), though thorough and individualized, are non-electronic and/or electronically-inaccessible and non-transportable to Datatel and Institutional Research. Therefore, the ATD report does not include the information necessary to track student success accurately.
    - ii. That fact that a grade of "S" in any developmental writing course does not necessarily equate with readiness to proceed to the next writing

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- course (despite the rationale presented) causes confusion and a barrier to tracking student success in the program.
- Institutional Research (under the guidance of Lori Hancock, Senior Institutional Research Analyst) is compiling a follow-up success funnel for developmental writing that involves gleaning data from individual students' final recommendation forms (Word documents housed on the Humanities drive). While this data will provide the student success information needed by the developmental faculty to analyze and improve the program, it is not something that can be integrated into Datatel or updated on an annual basis.
- iii. The ADT report does not identify specific cut scores on the Accuplacer tests or correlate scores with student success.
- iv. The ADT report does not separate the developmental reading courses (English 016 and 030) into the actual courses that students are moved into after they are registered at the beginning of the semester (i.e. 010, 012, or 014), so the success funnel data is not as meaningful as it could be.
- b. The team began reading about comparable schools and promising developmental education programs/projects in literature provided by ATD and reviewed MDEC's "An Analysis of Academic Policies and Practices in Developmental Education at Michigan's Associate Degree-Granting Institutions; Results and Executive Summary Fifth State Study" (Iseda 2010).
- c. The team is identifying the need for more information on the following issues (to be added on to/limited/revised at the January 28 meeting):
- i. Placement:
    - Are the current Accuplacer cut scores accurate in determining proper placement? How can that be assessed in each area?
    - Is there a good match between Accuplacer's assessment of reading grade level and the Nelson-Denny test used by the reading faculty (specifically, at the low end of the spectrum)? If not, what needs to be done to correct the problem?
    - As placement in developmental writing classes is recommended on the basis of a written essay, not Accuplacer scores, how can the specific recommendation be entered into the system?
    - The English faculty (reading and writing) re-assess student skills in the first week of class and move students between courses when

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necessary; how can that new placement information be updated in the computer system?

- Students are misplaced frequently enough to suggest that some may not be taking the placement tests seriously.
  - Is Accuplacer the best testing instrument for MCC's needs? Of the 28 community colleges in Michigan, only six use Accuplacer. The rest use Compass. Just three community colleges who have mandatory placement use Accuplacer (Iseda 2010.)
  - If mandatory placement is to be initiated, the reliability of Accuplacer will need to be assessed and verified prior to implementation.
  - If mandatory placement is initiated, it will be essential to maintain the current, or create new, methods for double-checking accurate placement.
  - If mandatory placement is initiated, how will MCC meet the facilities requirements for developmental reading and writing (mathematics has already moved to mandatory placement, so the facilities requirements may already be known and sufficient)?
  - Developmental courses should be taught by qualified, competent instructors. Does MCC place a priority on building the appropriate developmental teaching staff?
  - What lessons can we learn from comparable open admissions community colleges that have made the change to mandatory placement?
- ii. Advising:
- How are advising positions staffed? What initial training is provided to new advisors, and has this been updated to serve the increasing number of under-prepared students?
  - What on-going professional development is provided for advisors?
  - How are advisors trained to deal with students whose primary reason for coming to MCC is for the financial aid (for living expenses) and who may not be academically prepared or motivated to succeed in their courses?
  - What "red flags" about student academic preparedness do advisors need to see on their computer screens prior to enrolling them in courses?
  - How well do advisors understand the differences between various levels of the existing developmental reading and writing courses, and do they need to have this understanding?
  - How can advisors access the most current data on students' reading and writing skills (i.e. once students have taken a developmental English course)?

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- Since student placement in mathematics is now mandatory, do the advisors have all the information that they need to enroll students properly in mathematics courses?
  - Has the list of courses suitable for developmental students been updated recently, and do advisors know about it?
  - If no developmentally-appropriate courses are available for students (or not enough for a full load of classes), how are advisors trained to handle that situation?
  - Could "holistic" or "intrusive" advising improve student success, and how might it be piloted, if so?
  - What topics are included in the student orientation program, and has the program been changed to adapt to the increasing number of developmental students?
  - Could some holistic advising or student self-assessment be included in the student orientation program if it's not already part of the program?
  - Should faculty be surveyed to gather discipline-specific and/or general data about what academic skills (including study habits) students need to succeed in their courses, and, if so, how could that information be shared with students prior to course registration?
  - Should developmental students be required to see an academic advisor beyond the first semester? If so, how would the demand be met?
- iii. Developmental Mathematics:
- The ATD data (on the 2007 cohort's three-year performance) shows that 55% of those students recommended for developmental math enrolled in the recommended course. 14% who were recommended for developmental math enrolled, instead, in a gateway course. Did that happen prior to the mathematics department's switch to mandatory placement?
  - Are the mathematics faculty satisfied that the Accuplacer cut scores place students in the appropriate mathematics courses?
  - Do mathematics faculty reassess student placement during the first week to check student readiness for the course in which they're enrolled? That 75% of the 91 students who ignored the developmental math recommendation were able to pass the gateway course (100, 105, or 110) suggests that a follow-up assessment may be needed to ensure proper placement.
  - Does Mathematics 021 have a pre-requisite skill level, or is it designed to serve any student whose test scores show lack of readiness for college-level mathematics?

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- Since the majority of mathematics faculty (?) does not believe in the efficacy of modularized Mathematics 021 (as suggested by the CPSC proposal to eliminate the course), how could the modularized format be improved, and/or what other curriculum could be created to suit the need the modularized format was originally designed to meet? If the faculty do not create or believe in the curriculum, they are unlikely to have successful outcomes.
- Developmental mathematics is taught, primarily, by part-time and adjunct instructors. How can more full-time faculty be encouraged to teach developmental math? Will additional developmental teachers need to be hired?
- How satisfied are mathematics faculty with the Math Empowerment program, and if not, how might it be improved?

**Developmental Reading:**

- There is clear evidence that most new MCC students have low reading skills: 79% of the 2007 ATD cohort who took the Accuplacer reading test were recommended for developmental reading. However, most students do not follow that recommendation (just 16% followed their developmental recommendation). How might MCC highlight the importance of building reading skills prior to attempting courses that require college-ready or college-level reading skills?
- The ATD 2007 cohort study in reading is incomplete, in part, because a gateway course has been identified for reading.
  - How might we be tracking students' reading grade levels and moving students from English 016 into 010, 012, or 014 on the basis of their reading level skills at the beginning of each semester is an essential part of the developmental reading program. It is, however, quite time-consuming and not updated into IR records. Could Accuplacer's cut scores be modified, with the close collaboration of the reading faculty, to place students directly into the appropriate course?
  - Reading teachers maintain richly-detailed progress portfolios for each student, yet these records are not electronic and therefore not accessible by Institutional Research.
- If the goal is to more accurately track and analyze student success in the reading program, record keeping will need to be transformed, which will require close collaboration between reading faculty and IT and IR staff.
- Reading classes fill well before the registration period ends even without mandatory placement. There are not enough reading teachers on staff to meet the existing need, much less the growing need. Will

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finding, hiring, and training additional qualified and competent reading teachers become an institutional priority?

- Have textbooks and other reading materials used in each discipline been analyzed for their grade-level readability, and is that information shared with teachers, students, and advisors?
- Is there a grade-level threshold of reading skill that students need in order to have an opportunity to succeed at MCC? If so, can it be accurately measured as part of the registration process?
- What is an appropriate test score/grade level for defining "college-ready" reading skills? Is that the same as "college-level"?
- What reading-specific professional development might be offered to faculty across the curricula or by subject area?
- There is no tutoring program available for reading at MCC. Is one needed?
- Incoming reading students frequently have no computing experience (i.e. how to use a mouse), which presents a significant obstacle to learning (and misuse of instructional time) when the students are using individualized reading programs as part of the reading course. Would reading faculty find it beneficial to add basic academic computing skills as a pre-requisite for English 016 and 030 (i.e. as in skills taught in the new COMG 099 class)?

v. Developmental Writing:

- About half of the students in the ATD 2007 cohort who were recommended for developmental writing on the basis of the Accuplacer test (51%) did not enroll in developmental writing. However, once a student's Accuplacer score suggests developmental writing skills, he or she writes an essay which is then assessed by an English faculty member who recommends a particular course, including English 101. This revised placement recommendation is not updated in the system, nor is the subsequent classroom teacher's re-assessment and potential transfer of the student updated into the system.
- There are some additional problems (beyond record keeping) that the team has identified with the current writing placement process:
  - As the level of developmental writing skill is not assessed by Accuplacer's multiple choice format, some degree of subjectivity does come into play (unlike with developmental mathematics or reading's objective assessments of skill), though placement readers are provided with guidelines for determining the proper course and examples of "typical" student writing in each course.

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- Not all placement readers teach all levels of developmental writing (or any developmental writing), which may sometimes hinder their ability to make the best recommendation.
- Most placement essays are extremely short, suggesting that many students do not take this assessment seriously. It is difficult, sometimes, to recommend a particular course on the basis of two or three lines of writing.
  - 34% of the students in the ATD 2007 cohort who were recommended to take developmental writing attempted the gateway course (English 101), instead, and 82% of that group had English 101, further suggests that many students do not take the placement tests seriously and were correct that they did not need a developmental writing course.
- Because the developmental writing staff includes many transitory teachers, many of whom have little to no experience in teaching developmental writing at MCC or elsewhere, it is likely that many of these teachers are not adequately prepared to assess their students' "diagnostic" essays. They may not recognize cues in the student's writing that he or she is not ready to succeed in their course, and they may not be able to distinguish between 095, 098, and 099 readiness. Therefore, some students will not be recommended to transfer out of courses they have little chance of passing.
- For student success to be tracked accurately and meaningfully by IR, distinctions will need to be made between which developmental writing courses students take (this data is not available in the ATD report).
- The ATD data from the 2007 cohort spotlights the fundamental problem of an "S" in developmental writing classes not always meaning a student is ready to move forward. The team believes that if students are able to move forward because of an "S" grade, they should have demonstrated their ability to move forward. Students who are not ready to move forward should not be able to satisfy each of the course requirements and should not receive an "S" grade.
  - The developmental writing faculty have already agreed (as of January 13, 2011) to change how final grades are determined so that "S" will always mean "ready to move forward." That change should be in place in time for fall 2011 if not spring 2011.
  - The primary change will be to ensure that grading components, particularly the shared final assessments, will be weighted consistently and more heavily than they currently are, across all sections of each course.

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- While English 099's final essay exam is team-graded with a shared rubric, norming sessions will be needed for the final portfolios (the rubric is shared, but individual teachers assess their own students' work). As much of the staff is transitory, these norming sessions will be needed each semester.
- As English 095 is a relatively new course that has been offered just once each semester, consistency has not yet been a problem. As multiple courses are offered in coming semesters, the faculty will need to ensure that the criteria for a grade of "S" is articulated clearly enough to maintain consistency across sections.
- English 098 poses the greatest challenge at this point since so few teachers have experience with the course, and the program's focus has always been on 099, primarily (historically, there has been much greater demand for 099 than 098, but that has changed). With the 2009-10 creation of the departmental course pack for 098, the developmental faculty have made good progress in defining 098, and the final assessments have been completely revised. In addition, the developmental writing teachers' primary goal for the 2010-2011 school year is to more clearly articulate what students need to be able to demonstrate by the end of English 098, and that work will facilitate the move to "S" always means ready to move forward."
- Raising the bar for an "S" in English 098 and 099 will likely mean the failure rate will rise, initially, but improvements in placement (and perhaps implementing mandatory placement) should increase the percentage of students able to pass each course.
- Raising the bar for an "S" also means that many students who have made good progress in each course, but not enough to pass, will be difficult to retain. The English faculty is interested in exploring other options such as integrating reading and writing instruction in some format to accelerate and/or enhance student learning and retain students.
  - The developmental writing faculty's second goal for the 2010-2011 school year is to work more closely with the reading faculty. The developmental writing and reading coordinators and an additional reading teacher will be meeting in January to begin discussing shared goals and ideas for working together.

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- As with developmental reading, the developmental writing program's student-success record keeping will need to be transformed. Word documents housed on the Humanities drive are inaccessible to and unusable by IR in any sustainable way. The writing faculty will need to work closely with IT and IR to develop a new system that will serve instructional and data collecting/analyzing needs.
- While an increasing number of full-time English faculty are choosing to teach developmental courses, we expect more and more students to be placed into English 095, 098, and 099. Is the college prepared to make the hiring and training of qualified and competent developmental writing teachers a priority?

vi. Coordination Within and Between Developmental Programs:

- We have not yet examined this issue in any depth, and need to examine the current state of coordination plus look at possible improvements.  
 Part of the team's charge is to "make specific recommendations on . . . the potential for the creation of a comprehensive, coordinated, and cross-disciplinary developmental education program."
- Members of the developmental reading and writing faculty are planning to meet in January to discuss possible integration of some instruction and joint revision of existing, but not offered, English courses. It has, for years, been difficult time to work together.  
 In addition to the developmental programs exploring ways to work together, ongoing conversations are needed between Learning and Student Development, and faculty. How can this be facilitated?

vii. Miscellaneous Observations/Questions:

- The reports of the first MCC Blue Ribbon Committee on Developmental Education and the Blue II Committee contain valuable information. This AQIP team is studying, including recommendations by both committees. Our team members would benefit from reading both reports.
- Additional developmental or 100-level courses may be need to be created beyond mathematics, reading, and writing (such as Biology 100, Psychology 100, and the new general computing, COMG 099).
- How do MCC students "fail out" of individual courses and the college, and how does the NS grade figure in to this? (Chris Engle could tell us).

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- If students cannot get what they need, academically, at MCC, we should have a list of services and agencies available in Genesee County to use when advising students.
  - Late registering developmental students have a difficult time catching up even if they've only missed the first, foundational, day.
  - Developmental students frequently miss half of the first week of class because TR looks like "Thursday only" to them. If TTh cannot be used, TT might be clearer than TR.
- d. The team would like more information on the following issues from comparable schools:
- Their experience moving to mandatory placement--lessons learned
  - Whether mandatory placement has improved student success
  - Selective admissions—what's used? What is its impact?
  - Developmental education programs, by subject area as well as integrated/coordinated programs: What are other schools doing?
  - For schools that have coordinated/integrated developmental programs, what does that look like, and has it improved student success?
  - Learning communities in developmental education, and how they are facilitated
  - Developmental education in other areas (not just reading, writing, and mathematics): What are other schools offering?
  - Advising for developmental students: What works, and what is sustainable?
  - How placement works in other schools
  - How other schools have met the staffing challenges for developmental classes