In 2013, the Florida Legislature passed Senate Bill (SB) 1720, which called for all developmental education offered in the state to be accelerated, using one or more of the following instructional strategies: 1) co-requisite, 2) modularization, 3) compression, or 4) contextualization. The law also mandated changes in advising and student supports, and established meta-majors, which are a collection of academic programs that have common or related content. In addition, recent graduates of Florida public high schools (entering 9th grade in 2003-04 or later and graduating with a standard diploma) and active-duty military members are now exempt from assessment and placement into developmental education. Exempt students may still elect to be assessed, but they have the option to decline any referrals to developmental education. Students who do not meet the exemption criteria are required to be assessed, and if determined to have need must be presented with options for developmental education instruction. Colleges’ responses to the legislation have varied greatly, with many examples of innovation. The goal of this series is to document how colleges have responded to SB 1720 in order to highlight the decisions and processes colleges consider when implementing developmental education reform at scale.
Lake-Sumter State College leveraged a 2013 Title III grant to implement a developmental education redesign strategy it had been considering prior to Senate Bill 1720. It created modularized, compressed, and contextualized courses, and developed its advising approach from a model that was highly prescriptive to one that more deeply engages advisors in assessing students’ skills and making recommendations aligned to their programs of study.

**BEFORE SENATE BILL 1720**

Prior to Senate Bill 1720 becoming law, developmental education offerings at Lake-Sumter State College (LSSC) had the hallmarks of traditional developmental education. Incoming students were tested on a state-approved standardized test. Students who failed to meet state-approved cut scores were referred to developmental education. Students’ cut scores determined the level of developmental education to which they were referred. About 70 percent of incoming LSSC students were testing into developmental education. The majority of those placements—85 percent—were in mathematics. There were two levels of developmental education for math, English, and reading, and students testing into the lower levels of developmental education in math, English, or reading were required to complete the course sequence associated with each subject before enrolling in the math or English gateway courses. For example, students referred to lower levels of math would have to take Developmental Math I (MAT 0018) and II (MAT 0028) prior to enrolling in Intermediate Algebra (MAT 1033). Students referred to the lowest levels of English and reading faced a similar two-course sequence.

Before 1720 became law, advising at LSSC was prescriptive in that it was primarily focused on assessing incoming students’ cut scores and prescribing college-level or remedial courses based on such scores. After referring students who fell short of the state-approved cut scores for college-level courses to developmental education, the advisors were not directly involved in the developmental education experience. The math and English developmental education faculty dealt more directly with a cycle of high course failure rates, high course withdrawal rates, and a high number of course repeats. The advisors were re-engaged once students’ performance triggered an early warning flag in the student information system. By then, however, the students were in crisis with lower than optimal prospects of being easily put back on track for completion.

LSSC was exploring ways to increase success outcomes for developmental math prior to Senate Bill 1720. In 2011, the college began exploring the emporium model as a strategy to address the low success rates in developmental math. To further their efforts, LSSC applied for a Title III Strengthening Institutions Program (SIP) grant. In October 2013, LSSC was awarded $2.9 million over five years for the college to implement the math emporium model and to use student data to make better curriculum modifications in mathematics. The funding support provided the foundation for the college’s Senate Bill 1720 developmental math redesign. As one administrator pointed out, “I believe that’s what makes us a little different in this whole process—the miracle of getting that Title III grant in the midst of this.”
RESPONSE TO SENATE BILL 1720

LSSC established a steering committee to develop the institution’s plan to meet the new mandate. The dean of general education and transfer and the interim vice president of enrollment and student affairs chaired the committee, which included representatives from across the college, including faculty, administrators, advisors, financial aid, information technology, and institutional effectiveness. Using the state template for the required developmental education plan, the steering committee created subcommittees to draft the institution’s plan for implementing the new law. For example, the math and English faculty created the plan for the developmental education modalities for the redesigns in their respective areas, and the advisors created the plan for the meta-majors. The subcommittees area-specific plans were massaged and integrated to make up the LSSC Developmental Education Plan.

The steering committee established a schedule for regular meetings for developing the plan, which continued as LSSC began implementing the plan in fall 2014 and offering the newly redesigned courses. The steering committee reports up to the president and the president’s cabinet, regularly informing them of the status of implementation of LSSC’s Developmental Education Plan.

ACCELERATED MODALITIES

MATHEMATICS

LSSC developed a modular and a contextualized strategy for developmental math. Influenced by the National Center for Academic Transformation (NCAT), LSSC was already considering a modular approach to developmental mathematics. The college found the emporium model compelling because it addressed the reality of students entering developmental mathematics with wide ranges of ability. But there were complications, including the cost associated with the accompanying technology, which created obstacles to implementation. Thus, when Senate Bill 1720 first became law, LSSC believed that it was more expedient to implement a compressed model for developmental math. The compressed model, a shorter version of the traditional developmental math course, was considerably easier to implement in part because it required minimal curricular changes in what the college was already doing. Just as LSSC was preparing to abandon the modular approach for the compressed model, in October 2013, the college was awarded the five-year $2.9 million Strengthening Institutions Program (SIP) grant, which provided the resources needed to implement the emporium model. The timing was auspicious, as it was aligned with the timeline for the mandate for accelerated developmental education.

LSSC used the SIP grant to redesign the developmental and gateway mathematics sequence and to create and staff three math emporiums. The redesigned emporium courses involved Developmental Math I (MAT 0018) and II (MAT 0028), followed by college-level math—Intermediate Algebra (MAT 1033)—and then College Algebra (MAC 1105). In the newly redesigned emporium model, students receive a diagnosis of their skill levels by using pre-tests and are assigned modules in MAT 0018 and MAT 0028 that they complete at their own pace with the support of instructors and tutors in the emporiums as needed. In the new model, it is possible, but not required as in the compressed model, for students to complete MAT 0028 in eight weeks instead of the traditional 15- or 16-week semester. Exceptional students who complete the course within eight weeks are then able to enroll in a mini-semester MAT 1033 section in the same semester. Students who successfully complete MAT 0018 prior to the end of the semester are seamlessly advanced to the MAT 0028 modules in the same semester. Those students that also complete MAT 0028 in the same semester that they began MAT 0018 earn credit for both courses, yet only pay tuition for one course. For those students that complete most, but not all, of the MAT 0018 (or MAT 0028) modules in one semester, the college has created a one-credit, five- to seven-week MAT 0019 (Developmental Math I Modules) so students may complete the MAT 0018 (or MAT 0028) modules without paying for the full four-credit MAT 0018 (or MAT 0028).

In addition to the modularized strategy, LSSC also developed a contextualized developmental math course, Developmental Math for Liberal Arts (MAT 0029), for students who are in meta-majors and programs of study that are do not require College Algebra. MAT 0029 is designed to prepare students for college-level statistics. LSSC is developing a follow-on course, MAT 1100, for non-STEM majors that will serve as a gateway course to college-level statistics, much like MAT 1033 serves as the gateway to College Algebra.
ENGLISH AND READING

LSSC developed a compressed, modular English and reading redesign. The college accelerated English and reading by compressing the timeframe of the courses to seven weeks and by offering the two levels in both English and reading at the same time in the same classroom. For example, Developmental Writing I (ENC 0015) and II (ENC 0025) are taught by the same instructor and meet together in a single classroom. Students who complete ENC 0015 in the seven-week compressed course can enroll in ENC 0025 in the next seven weeks and complete the full developmental English sequence in 14 weeks, as opposed to 28 weeks under the traditional model. Exceptional students who successfully complete ENC 0015 within the first seven weeks can bypass ENC 0025 with the approval of the instructor and demonstrated competency on an exit test and may enroll directly in a 7-week version of the gateway English course, ENC 1101, and potentially complete the English developmental and gateway coursework in 14 weeks, as opposed to the 42 weeks it would have taken under the previous law.

In spring of 2014, LSSC modularized ENC 0015 and ENC 0025. Students are now diagnosed at the start of their class, receive individual education plans, and receive credit for the course after demonstrating mastery. The approach to reading is the same as English, but with the exemption and opt-out provisions of the law, very few students enroll in developmental reading, so few sections are offered.

STUDENT ADVISING

There have been substantial shifts in LSSC’s approach to advising following the implementation of Senate Bill 1720. The college has continued its comprehensive approach for aligning students’ educational and career goals with the college’s many offerings, but without the use of placement cut scores. Student meta-major designations have replaced cut scores as the foundational element by which students are advised. Incoming students participate in a multidimensional advising strategy—Student Orientation, Advising, and Registration (SOAR)—which focuses on student success skills, academic planning, and registration, and student support resources. Students pick a meta-major at the time of application. Their advisor uses the meta-major designation, exemption status, and other documented student achievements to create a comprehensive plan for advising students into programs of study and developmental education strategies as appropriate.

The loss of the ability to use cut scores in the advising process and the introduction of meta-majors were instrumental in advisors filling the gap in LSSC’s three-part (prescriptive, developmental, and intrusive) advising model. SB 1720 forced the advisors to deemphasize the prescriptive phase of the model and become more engaged in the development phase. Shifting to meta-majors as the basis of placement required deeper engagement with students about their education and career goals. Rather than waiting to re-engage students in the intrusive phase of the model when students are in crisis, advisors invested time in helping students assess their skill levels for their intended programs of study. They also recommended strategies to improve academic preparation within the context of the students’ skill levels and academic and career goals. This was a marked shift from the advisors’ original reaction to the new law. Initially, advisors spent considerable effort recommending that students with weak skills forego their exemption status and enroll in developmental education. While advisors continue to believe that cut scores are useful in the advisement process, they view the deeper engagement in the development phase of the advisement model as a positive development. As the head of enrollment and student affairs added, getting involved in the redesign process allowed advisors to be more involved in the discussion about student success that their academic colleagues were already having—“so that was kind of an ‘a-ha’ for us in this process.”

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

While it is too early to assess the full impact of LSSC’s efforts to implement their Developmental Education Plan required by Senate Bill 1720, the college notes large disparities between exempt and non-exempt students. Prior to SB 1720, the pass rate in MAT 1033 was close to 60 percent. In spring of 2014, before the emporium redesign, the success rate for exempt students without a qualifying cut score on a state-approved placement test or a passing score for MAT 0028 was between 25 and 30 percent. The college had placement scores for the students who entered LSSC in August 2013, so the college knew the students’ developmental education status.
As the emporium model was implemented in spring 2015, there was still a gap in MAT 1033 success rates in comparison with the success rate before the law. Students marked exempt on their transcripts had success rates of 40 percent. LSSC does not have placement scores for these students but presumably, some of the students would have placed into MAT 1033 had they been assessed, but others would have tested into MAT 0018 or MAT 0028. The success rate for non-exempt students was much higher, at 65 to 68 percent. Given that the fall 2014 to spring 2015 retention rate for students who successfully completed MAT 1033 was near 90 percent, LSSC wants to increase the number of exempt students who pass MAT 1033, as the retention rate for students who are not successful in MAT 1033 is 30 percentage points lower, at 60 percent. Furthermore, data has shown that the MAT 1033 success rate in spring 2015 for those students who successfully completed the redesigned MAT 0028 in fall 2014 was around 85 percent.

In the spring 2015 semester, the success rate in REA 0007 was 63 percent and in REA 0017 was 84 percent, yet only 8 and 32 students, respectively, were enrolled in the courses college-wide. The spring 2015 success rate in both ENC 0015 and ENC 0025 was 77 percent, with 26 students served in each of the compressed courses.

GOING FORWARD

LSSC believes that the newly redesigned courses will make a difference for students taking developmental education. In the redesigned courses, students with high levels of motivation can cut their time in developmental education in half. Exceptional students can leverage the self-pacing in the modular emporium model and reduce their time in developmental education even more. The college accepts that acceleration can increase student outcomes in general but continues to struggle with acceleration being the solution for all students, especially students from special populations. In the college's historical experience, students with disabilities, for example, need more time to bring up their foundational academic skills.

LSSC credits the five-year, $2.9 million Title III grant as a foundational element to the success of their mathematics redesign effort. The grant provided the fiscal support for the redesign that was lacking in the Senate Bill 1720 mandate. Without the funding to implement the preferred modular strategy, LSSC would have had to implement its second choice of modality, the compressed model. Comprehensive reform would have been more readily accomplished with funding to support the changes.

As LSSC moves forward with implementing their newly redesigned developmental education policies, the college continues to struggle with the loss of cut scores in the admissions process. The college supports the use of multiple measures assessment, but considers doing so time consuming, especially given the small number of advisors. Despite the challenges this and other aspects of the redesign present, LSSC is optimistic about the prospects for improved completion. Most at LSSC agree with the spirit of SB 1720 and believe that the college has made tremendous progress.
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