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.
North Florida Community College is a small rural institution where faculty, staff, and administrators know most students by name. The college kept its culture of individualized attention in mind as it developed its response to Senate Bill 1720. Their redesign process was marked by a great deal of collaboration and creativity, as well as a continuous improvement process that has led to additional changes for the coming academic year.

**BEFORE SENATE BILL 1720**

North Florida Community College began piloting redesigned developmental education courses before Senate Bill 1720 passed. In 2010, the college received a three-year grant through the Florida Developmental Education Initiative that allowed it to implement a modular design using the emporium model in a few sections of developmental math. Although the courses were not entirely accelerated, students had opportunities to work at their own pace and move on to the next course in the sequence within the same semester, and a handful of students moved on to the gateway course through that route. The college also piloted an accelerated writing course with a similar design. The results of these efforts were mixed; some students were successful, but others found the pace “exhausting.” One administrator also noted that many students did not like the loose structure of the emporium model and wanted a more traditional format. This pilot phase provided North Florida with valuable feedback that it would use to retool the redesign models to better fit its student population once SB 1720 was passed.

**RESPONSE TO SENATE BILL 1720**

When the legislation passed, the leadership at North Florida convened a college-wide developmental education team with representation from enrollment services, developmental education, learning resources, advising, and faculty. The group engaged in regular dialogue—both in the initial planning stages of the redesign plan, and throughout the implementation process. North Florida officials expressed that they may have been more prepared than other Florida colleges in this process because they already had experience with and unique insight on the mandated modalities.

In fall 2013, the college informed current developmental education students of the upcoming exemption. Advisors went to developmental classrooms and explained that students who would be considered exempt would not be required to enroll in the second-level developmental courses the following semester. In spring 2014, most exempt students decided to complete their developmental education sequences, which left faculty and administrators hopeful that students would still prioritize taking these courses going forward. However, with an influx of new students coming directly from high school in fall 2014, the college saw a significant drop in developmental education enrollment rates. Officials attribute the spring 2014 enrollment rates to the fact that current students already had relationships with advisors, as well as experience with developmental courses, so they were more willing to take advisors’ recommendations.
REDESIGNED COURSE OFFERINGS

Initially, North Florida’s plan for redesigning developmental education focused primarily on modularized and compressed courses. In English, the college offered an integrated reading and writing course (ENC 0027) that combines the two upper-level reading and writing courses into one 16-week, 4-credit course taught in the traditional face-to-face format. The course was designed for higher-needs students who are less comfortable with technology. Since the college originally did not know whether financial aid would cover “optional” developmental courses, it also created one- and two-credit options to keep costs down. These included a two-credit, eight-week developmental writing module (ENC 0056) that was computer-based, as well as a one-credit, eight-week writing course for upper-level students (ENC 0054), taught face-to-face. A similar sequence was offered in reading, with a compressed, modularized developmental reading course (REA 0056), and a compressed version of upper-level reading (REA 0054).

Like their English colleagues, the math faculty focused on providing a variety of modalities based on students’ needs and skill levels. They offered a compressed course (MAT 0022) that combines two levels of developmental math into one 16-week, 4-credit course taught in the traditional format. They also created a two-credit, eight-week developmental math module (MAT 0056) as well as two versions of a one-credit, upper-level math course (MAT 0054): 1) an eight-week compressed course taught face-to-face and 2) a five-week, traditional-format course students could take before taking MAT 1033 for the remainder of the semester.

North Florida has since revised its developmental course offerings in response to feedback from faculty, staff, and students that the original plan was complicated and confusing. One administrator noted, “We discovered it was too many options for students […] and it was too much to deal with in advising. As a consequence, we are moving to a much simpler model for next year.” In addition, the college heard more feedback that students preferred traditional face-to-face instruction over modularized options. Another administrator attributed this to the college’s local context: “We live and work in a rural area, where [students] come from schools where everybody knows their name. And we are at a college where we can practically call students by name across the campus. They don’t like working on their own and calling over an instructor only if and when they need them. They want the interaction.”

As a result, North Florida is reducing its modular course offerings and adding more co-requisite options. It is also eliminating the five- and eight-week course options, in response to students’ difficulty with the pace of mini-semester courses and issues around registration. In fall 2015, the college will offer four developmental courses in both math and English. The compressed, traditional-format courses (MAT 0022 and ENC 0027) will remain, and the two-credit, computer-based modular courses (MAT 0056 and ENC 0056) will now be offered for a full semester. Students will have two one-credit options in math: a co-requisite seminar paired with MAT 1033, and another paired with STA 2023—an introductory statistics course that no longer has MAT 1033 as a prerequisite. These seminars, in addition to a new co-requisite seminar paired with ENC 1101, will begin in the third week of the semester, allowing students to register after taking an “awareness assignment” that serves as an early diagnostic. Advisors will visit the gateway courses early on to inform students of the co-requisite options, which are all taught by learning specialists from the Academic Success Center. The final course option for English will be a new one-credit contextualized reading seminar focused on STEM and health sciences—two popular meta-majors at the college.

To encourage students to take these one-credit seminars, North Florida has developed a creative incentive. Students who successfully complete one of these seminars will be granted a tuition waiver for one credit hour the next term. In addition, the one-credit seminars pose no costs to students in terms of materials, books, or software, as students focus on the work they are doing in their college-level classes.

ADVISING AND STUDENT SUPPORTS

North Florida has also made ongoing changes to its advising system since Senate Bill 1720 passed. Before that, all new students met in person with an advisor for an initial discussion around course selection and registration. During these 30 to 45 minute sessions, advisors made recommendations around developmental education or college-level courses based on students’ results on the PERT placement test.
For the most part, students adhered to their advisors’ recommendations.

The advisors’ process for assessing a student’s skill level became more complicated and time-intensive once SB 1720 passed, and many fewer students had PERT scores, and advising sessions could last at least 90 minutes. The head of advising noted that many advisors have not received students' transcripts when they meet with them, so they engage students in a “lengthy, open-ended question series to find out what would be best.” Among the measures advisors use to inform their recommendations are students' high school GPAs, course history, and grades. They also share sample problems and writing samples from the gateway math and English courses to give students a sense of what to expect of college-level work.

Advisors also started introducing meta-majors to students after SB 1720, but found that—on top of all the developmental course options—the meta-majors were confusing to students. The head of advising remarked that many students did not want to pick a meta-major in their initial advising session, even if that meant a hold was placed on their registration. He attributed this to an overload of information. “Looking back, we were hitting students up with too much information in that first sitting. [...] We would have benefitted from two or three advising sessions instead.” With only three advisors for roughly 800 new students every year, this process has been a challenging one for the advising department, which has not hired any additional staff.

More recently, the college has developed two new tools to help guide students through the advising and enrollment processes. The first is a series of eight academic maps, called “AAs with Emphases,” which are tied to the eight meta-majors. These maps help students find what courses they need to take based on their career interests, with recommended options for each pathway. Students also have access to a mobile-friendly website that provides descriptions of each meta-major, as well as lists of North Florida courses and programs, potential university transfer majors, and possible careers associated with each one. The college feels that these tools, launched in summer 2015, provide students with the structure that was missing in the first year of implementation.

As far as student supports, SB 1720 prompted North Florida to expand its academic support safety nets, with a focus on just-in-time interventions, which led the college to revamp the Academic Success Center. They moved the facility into the library to make it more accessible to students, expanded tutoring services and study skills workshops, and doubled the number of students attending library orientations within one semester.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

North Florida does not yet have complete data to understand how these changes have impacted students. The college implemented a new course assessment data system around the same time as the implementation of Senate Bill 1720, which has impacted its ability to generate comparative data on student outcomes pre- and post-redesign.

College officials did note that enrollment rates in developmental education courses have dropped significantly. From fall 2013 to fall 2014, enrollment in developmental English courses dropped 51 percent, and developmental math enrollment dropped 47 percent. Anecdotally, the college reported that many students are not following their advisors’ recommendations to take developmental courses, especially in reading. The college also reported that enrollment rates in the gateway courses did not go up significantly, as they anticipated they would, because many students skipped MAT 1033 and ENC 1101 altogether and enrolled in classes that don't require pre-requisites, such as history, psychology, and biology, where—as one administrator pointed out—they were just as underprepared.

North Florida officials are eager to receive guidelines from the state as far as what data colleges should be collecting and how. One administrator explained that the college is working on pulling data to determine how its students are doing. However, because the exempt/non-exempt coding process began in fall 2013, not all students in gateway or even developmental courses are coded, i.e., students who entered North Florida prior to fall 2013. “Determining the impact of dev. ed. interventions on students in gateway courses also requires additional research to determine which students have previously taken dev. ed. classes, regardless of their code status, and this has been a cumbersome process.”

In addition to issues around data collection, the college reported several other challenges, including the short timeline for implementation, the lack of additional
funding for advisement, and the fact that SB 1720 carried with it so many changes at once. Several officials expressed concern that some students may have been lost during the transition from pre-SB 1720 to post-SB 1720.

**GOING FORWARD**

Despite these challenges, North Florida officials pointed out some “silver lining” outcomes of the process and expressed optimism about what’s next. They described the process of developing and implementing the plan as a collaborative one that engaged all departments in dialogue about what’s best for students. It also transformed the college’s concept of academic support. One administrator said the tutoring center went from being perceived as punitive—a place where students went when they were in academic trouble—to a learning resource that reaches many more students. The college is particularly enthusiastic about the new co-requisite courses and looks forward to seeing the results of all of its newly revised tools and offerings. Said one administrator: “I do look forward to the day where all of this will pay off and it will improve retention and time to completion. I think there is great potential there.”

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