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.
St. Petersburg College (SPC) stands out for its strong institutional capacity around data and technology, its nimbleness in prioritizing and implementing its developmental education redesign plan quickly, the collaboration and commitment across the college to the redesign process, and effective training and communication strategies. Described by one administrator as an “initiative-rich institution,” SPC kept its focus on student success throughout the change process.

BEFORE SENATE BILL 1720

Like many Florida colleges, SPC began redesigning its developmental education courses before Senate Bill 1720 was passed. For instance, in spring 2011, with support from the Florida Developmental Education Initiative, the college’s deans of mathematics and communications launched the “My Bridge to Success” program to reduce the time and cost of remediation for students with developmental need. The program offers eight-week, two-credit courses in reading, writing, and math, as alternatives to the college’s traditional 16-week, four-credit courses. Students take these compressed, modularized courses through a self-paced, blended course format that includes adaptive learning software and lectures. SPC reports that in math, reading, and writing, success rates for students who took the redesigned courses from fall 2011 to fall 2013 were higher than those for students who took the traditional developmental courses during the same period.

In fall 2012, SPC launched a comprehensive student success initiative called “The College Experience,” aimed at giving all students the tools and supports they need to succeed from application to graduation. The initiative targets high-need students, such as FTIC students and developmental students. It has five components: 1) a revamped in-person orientation for new students, 2) expanded academic support services outside the classroom, 3) integrated academic and career advising, 4) an early alert and coaching system for struggling students, and 5) an online, individualized academic planning tool. These efforts led to increased student success rates over the initiative’s first two years, with dramatic gains among African-American and Hispanic males in both developmental and gateway courses. For example, success rates in developmental courses increased 24.5 percentage points for African-American males and 22.6 percentage points for Hispanic males from spring 2012 to spring 2014. In gateway courses, success rates rose 13.9 percentage points for African-American males and 18.8 percentage points for Hispanic males. The college is proud of these gains, and concerned that success rates (especially for males of color) declined after SB 1720 changes went into effect.

RESPONSE TO SENATE BILL 1720

After Senate Bill 1720 passed, SPC responded with swift and decisive action. On June 4, 2013, the college’s senior leadership held a “Collaborative Lab”—an interactive, technology-enabled strategy

Quick Facts

**Location:** St. Petersburg, FL
**Campuses:** 11
**Setting:** Urban
**Total Enrollment:** 57,214
**Student Demographics:**
- Average age: 28
- Gender: 58% female, 40% male
- Race/ethnicity:
  - African-American: 13.6%
  - White: 65.5%
  - Hispanic: 11.2%
  - Asian: 3.5%
  - American-Indian: 0.4%
  - Pacific Islander: 0.3%
  - Multiple races: 2.3%
  - Not reported: 3.2%

Source: Enrollment statistics; [www.spcollege.edu](http://www.spcollege.edu); 2015 interview
A key component of the college’s approach was redesigning the student intake system. One of their first steps was to communicate the new placement options in terms students would understand. Instead of the “exempt” and “non-exempt” categories described in the bill, SPC used high school and military records to assign students to one of two tracks: “flexible placement,” for students who no longer have to take a placement test and can enroll directly in college-level courses, and “traditional placement,” for students who still have to take a placement test. Students in the traditional track who place into at least one developmental education course must attend new student orientation and meet with an advisor to learn about the course options available to them. Students in the flexible track must also meet with an advisor, who explains their options and makes recommendations based on a sophisticated analytical model the college created to predict students’ level of college readiness.

To develop this model, researchers at the college analyzed electronic high school transcripts of incoming SPC students who graduated from Florida public high schools from 2008 to 2011. They loaded data from the transcripts into the SPC student information system and studied how students who would have qualified for the new flexible placement track had performed on the common placement test. They found that several factors were correlated with college readiness, including: completion of specific high school courses—such as AP, IB, honors, and college prep courses; overall GPA; subject-specific GPAs; completion of dual-enrollment courses; and completion of foreign language courses. Based on these factors, the researchers developed predictive rubrics for math, reading, and writing that allow advisors to identify whether students are “likely college ready,” “developmental education recommended,” or “developmental education strongly recommended” in each subject.

SPC’s IT team programmed the predictive model into the student information system, so all of the information is automated. They also collaborated with advisors to develop a series of web pages that guide students and staff through the advising process. When the college receives a student’s transcript electronically, the system generates a college-readiness prediction and corresponding course recommendations in each subject—which are captured on the student’s “Flexible Placement” page. If the electronic transcript is unavailable, advisors enter the relevant information into a “College Readiness Data” page to generate the predictions and recommendations. Advisors meet with students to discuss their course options and provide students with sample questions from college-level courses as well as opportunities to take low-stakes online assessments, the PERT placement test, and massive open online courses (MOOCs) to help them make the most informed choices. After meeting with their advisors, students gain access to their “My Placement” page, where they document whether they accept or decline the recommendations in each subject, and are then eligible to register for classes. Advisors led in-person trainings on how to use these pages across the college that included simulations addressing various student circumstances.

SPC put other initiatives on hold and dedicated significant human and financial resources to develop these sophisticated tools—which the college’s head of institutional research said may be difficult for smaller colleges to do.
REDESIGNED COURSE OFFERINGS

In addition to the My Bridge courses, SPC provides developmental students with several new course options. The communications department now offers a co-requisite option that pairs ENC 1101, the gateway composition course, with an 8-week, 1-credit writing support course that meets twice a week and is taught by the same professor. Students may also take combined modularized versions of developmental writing I (ENC 0015) and II (ENC 0025) and developmental reading I and II. These courses are offered over 12 or 16 weeks, and provide additional opportunities for acceleration. For example, if students in ENC 0015 meet the requirements for ENC 0025, they can bypass ENC 0025 and enroll in the ENC 0056 My Bridge course at the recommendation of their professor. Students may also take an integrated upper-level developmental reading and writing course offered for 6 credits over 16 weeks.

Similar to English, the math department offers new modularized and compressed developmental education courses that provide students with the option to complete both courses in a single semester. The faculty also developed a new integrated course that combines the two levels of developmental math into one 5-credit course delivered through lecture or modularized format. Students may also take a 2-credit My Bridge course; the 1-credit My Bridge course is not currently offered due to low enrollments. There are also a number of MOOCs available to help students brush up on their basic skills in math, as well as writing and reading.

The math faculty also created another gateway course called “Exploration of Mathematics and Quantitative Reasoning,” which serves as an alternative to intermediate algebra. It is an elective, college-credit-bearing course designed for students interested in degrees that require liberal arts math and/or statistics, such as selected health sciences, education, and public safety. Students interested in STEM majors are required to pursue the intermediate algebra pathway. This curricular change, explained the dean of mathematics, is based on “a growing realization” across the math field “that not everybody needs intermediate algebra.” It’s also part of SPC’s ongoing shift to a guided pathways approach to helping students identify and navigate career pathways and the courses associated with each early on.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

So far, SPC has found that many students are not following their advisors’ recommendations about developmental courses and are enrolling directly in gateway courses. The college’s head of institutional research reported that about 50 percent of students follow the advice in math, 35 percent do so in writing, and 10 percent do in reading. He said students find it more socially acceptable to admit they need help with math than with reading, which carries more of a stigma. The result is that enrollment rates for developmental courses have dropped significantly—by 23 percent overall in spring 2014—especially in reading courses. Among flexible placement students who were recommended for developmental math and enrolled in MAT 1033, 23 percent passed in spring 2014. Fifty-three percent of students recommended for developmental reading passed ENC 1101, and the same percentage of students recommended for developmental writing also passed the course.

For fall 2014, the overall success rate for flexible placement students who took the college’s recommendations was 70.5 percent, compared to 55.3 percent of those who enrolled in college-level courses. The college saw an even greater difference in success rates for men of color—a group that experienced significant gains in the first two years of the College Experience—between those who took the college’s advice and those who didn’t. Among African-American males, 55.7 percent of flexible placement students who took the college’s recommendation passed, compared to 37.6 percent of those who enrolled in the college-level course; and among Hispanic males, 73.4 percent of those who took the college’s recommendation passed, compared to 53.4 percent who didn’t follow the college’s advice.

There are different ways of interpreting these preliminary data. For example, when SPC learned that 35 percent of students who enrolled in college-level math after being deemed “strongly recommended” for developmental education passed in fall 2014, their Achieving the Dream coach viewed the outcome as promising—since 35 percent of students who would have previously gone through the traditional developmental math sequence passed the college-level course on their first try. In contrast, the college was concerned. One administrator explained that there are still the other 65 percent of students that SPC takes
responsibility for as an institution. He specifically pointed out the lost gains among African-American and Hispanic males. He also emphasized that many students who were unsuccessful in the college-level courses are not attempting these courses again, while some other students are avoiding them altogether.

GOING FORWARD

These patterns inform SPC’s next steps. The college is continuing to embed additional supports into gateway courses to address students’ needs. Beginning in fall 2015, students in Intermediate Algebra will be able to take a one-credit co-requisite lab course recommended especially for flexible placement students. SPC will also launch “Smart Start Orientation,” required for all new degree-seeking students, which will be offered in a blended classroom and online format. The hands-on program will provide mentoring and support students in navigating the college, and with academic and career planning. Finally, SPC plans to ramp up its use of technology to track and disaggregate student data and to better communicate changes across the college.

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