

Commission on Higher Education Policies on Developmental Education in South Carolina

Background

The term developmental education¹, as used in this document, refers to sub-collegiate level preparatory courses in English, mathematics, reading, science, basic skills, and second language learning. Providing appropriate developmental education has been a long-time concern for policymakers in South Carolina. *The Cutting Edge* (Act 629) legislation, which became law in 1988, represented a desire by the General Assembly to implement developmental education in an economically efficient and educationally effective manner. Under the authority granted to it by Act 629, Section 59-104-30, the Commission on Higher Education was specifically entrusted to develop provisions, procedures, and requirements for developmental education programs in public higher education. In 1989, the Commission adopted policy under the provisions of Act 629 that:

1. required tests to determine entry skills of students whose past performance indicated they might have difficulty with college-level work;
2. required an identified minimum threshold of achievement to qualify for college degree credit courses;
3. prohibited developmental courses from being used at public institutions for awarding degree-applicable credit;
4. called for the establishment of agreements for the supplying of developmental coursework for students at four-year institutions by neighboring two-year public institutions where possible; and
5. required that each institution develop a tracking system for determining satisfactory progress in developmental studies.

In addition, in December 1994, the Commission on Higher Education adopted funding policies which prohibited state funds from flowing to the three research institutions for developmental education and which limited funding of developmental education at four-year teaching institutions to the level of funding received in 1993-1994. Then, as part of its obligation under *The Cutting Edge*, the Commission conducted a statewide review of all developmental education programs in the state in 1993-1994. An external team of consultants conducted on-site review of 12 of the public institutions offering developmental programs. The consultants also examined current practice, which showed that the policies adopted by the Commission were consistent with those of other states at that time (i.e., California and Florida) particularly with respect to channeling these courses to the two-year sector.

In 1995, staff determined the State of South Carolina could save approximately \$1.73 million per year by placing all developmental coursework under the auspices of the two-year institutions. The Commission then implemented policy for developmental programs designed to minimize cost, maximize successful learning outcomes, eliminate unnecessary duplication, and provide the coordination of such education activities at the state level as called for by the consultants. The following policies were adopted by the Commission on Higher Education in November of 1995 and integrate the requirements of the legal authorization and obligations imposed by *The Cutting Edge*, the consultants' report, and Commission decisions since 1989 in developing statewide policy for developmental education.

¹ Developmental education is often referred to as remedial education in other states.

Policies

1. Developmental courses can only be offered by two-year institutions.
Note: The University of South Carolina decided the two-year regional campuses would not offer any developmental coursework. Instead, all developmental students would be placed in "enriched" sections of entry-level courses that count towards degrees based on the Commission consultants' report urging that eligible students be "mainstreamed" into regular coursework as soon as possible.
2. The assessment process for developmental education course placement should include instruments measuring student's affective characteristics (e.g., attitudes, emotions, perceptions)
3. Each public South Carolina institution of higher education which offers developmental education should have an individual specifically assigned to coordinate all developmental education.
4. All developmental programs in South Carolina should develop statements of missions, goals, and objectives that are shared with all faculty, staff, and students participating in these programs.
5. All South Carolina developmental programs should have an established professional development component for their faculty and staff.
6. Critical thinking, reasoning, and learning-to-learn skills should be integrated into all developmental courses.
7. Greater attention should be paid to the individual learning styles of students in all developmental courses.
8. All developmental courses should meet at least four times per week regardless of institutional calendars or schedules.
9. All developmental courses should emphasize mastery learning.
10. Where appropriate, South Carolina institutions should consider mainstreaming developmental students and using supplemental instruction to support them in regular college courses.
11. The technical colleges should develop a common course system for developmental education courses to be instituted for students assessed with need throughout public higher education in South Carolina. This system should include such issues as:
 - a. Common criteria for student competencies based upon common assessment instruments designed to assess eligibility for mandatory placement and for exiting from all developmental courses;
 - b. A common and simplified course numbering system below the 100 level;
 - c. Common course syllabi for developmental coursework;
 - d. Elimination of all non-degree credit courses at or above 100 level, so that such courses must be applicable to some associate degree;
 - e. Development of a common system for evaluation for student performance in all developmental courses; and
 - f. Both classroom and laboratory work for all developmental classes in remediation.

12. The technical colleges should grant institutional credit in developmental courses not to exceed 3 credits per course regardless of whether contact hour time exceeds three hours per week in semester courses.
13. Successful exit from the highest level of developmental education coursework in a discipline as determined by the Advisory Committee on Academic Programs will be a necessary and sufficient condition for a student's acceptance into a first college-level course in that discipline (if English or mathematics) or, for reading, in a reading-intensive course (e.g., history or literature) without further validation or testing at any public two-year or four-year institution in South Carolina.
14. The technical colleges should consider elimination of all non-degree credit to fulfill requirements for any certificate or diploma program that has a related, cognate associate degree to avoid unnecessary duplication of costs and time for students.
15. All students who are residents of South Carolina should be limited to a total of 30 credit hours of developmental coursework, consistent with federal limitations for eligibility for student financial aid.
16. All students in developmental studies should be limited to taking any developmental course not more than twice at the cost of tuition. Thereafter, any re-taking of the course will be at the full cost of the course.
17. A common statewide tracking system should be implemented by all public institutions offering developmental education for purposes of program evaluation; the tracking reports should be a part of the developmental education section of Institutional Effectiveness reports submitted to the Commission.