



Guest Editorial: Developmental Education Structure

by Kathryn Kozak

All community colleges around the nation have a commonality of focusing heavily on developmental mathematics. A key issue is the question of how the developmental mathematics courses are organized at each institution. One of the common organizations is to have the developmental math sequence in the math department and taught generally by faculty who teach both developmental and college level courses. The other is to have a centralized developmental program that includes all developmental courses and is taught generally by faculty that only teach the developmental courses. There are arguments for and against both structures.

One argument presented for the centralized developmental program is that students are more successful in this manner. A study conducted by Boylan, Bliss, and Bonham under the Exxon Education Foundation found evidence that this is true. However, what they found was that it was the coordination of developmental courses and services that seemed to increase student success and not just that there was a centralized program. It is the coordination between the courses, study skills, tutoring, and advising that increases retention rates and GPAs, and not the organization of the developmental courses. However, at some colleges it may be important to have the centralized developmental program to facilitate the coordination. At other colleges this may not be feasible; the coordination is possible when developmental courses are within the mathematics department.

Some arguments against a centralized developmental program relate to a disconnect between mathematics teachers that teach the developmental sequence only and those who teach the college level courses. Some college level mathematics instructors feel that they have no input into the curriculum in the developmental sequence and feel that the students are not ready for the college level courses. Some developmental mathematics instructors feel as if their courses have second-class status instead of having the importance that is their due, and may also feel a lack of input into the college-level curriculum. Communication and respect are possible when developmental courses are centralized.

The structure of the developmental mathematics courses is an important concept that will continue to be part of the local and national discussions. At least one affiliate is having discussions about this at their yearly meeting. Even at colleges where the structure is mandated by the state or administrators, discussions could still take place between all faculty to improve the developmental and college level courses. Opening up the dialogue is the best way to help make an educated decision at your college; you may want to consider starting similar discussions at your campus and at your affiliate meeting. Within AMATYC, the forum for these discussions is the Developmental Mathematics Committee; for information on that group and how to join, see the web site devmath.amaryc.org for details.

References:

Boylan, H. R., Bliss, L. B., Bonham, B. S., "Program Components and Their Relationship to Student Performance," *Journal of Developmental Education*, Volume 20, Issue 3, Spring, 1997.

Brothen, T., Wambach, C. A., "Refocusing Developmental Education," *Journal of Developmental Education*, Volume 28, Number 2, Winter 2004.