

Embedded Remediation: A New Paradigm

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Guttman Community College (GCC), a newly-established, urban community college, part of the City University of New York (CUNY), enrolls a largely traditional student body which is also predominantly minority. Out of 824 students enrolled in fall 2015, 49% were under the age of 19, 29% were 19, and 20% were between the ages of 20 and 22; 57% were female and 43% male; 60% were Hispanic, 26% Black or African American, 10% White, and 5% Asian or Pacific Islander. The percentage of students awarded need-based financial aid was 71% (Guttman Community College, n.d.a). Students enter the college with an average high-school grade-point average of 75% (C average), and are required to enroll in three first-year courses in the first semester: City Seminar, Statistics, and Ethnographies of Work. As is the case with most community colleges, a large number of entering freshmen at CUNY are in need of “remediation” as documented by the Office of Institutional Research (2015).

More than one-half of all first-time freshmen entering CUNY in fall 2014 were assigned to remedial instruction in at least one subject (57%), typically in math. Remediation is especially prevalent in associate degree programs, where 81% of freshmen are assigned to some remediation.

At the outset, however, GCC faculty, staff, and administration committed to creating a model for developmental education that embedded the needed skill development into college-level courses. GCC accomplishes remediation through an approach in which additional contact hours are built into first-year courses to help students work on reading, writing, and quantitative skills. Whether or not they earned passing scores on their assessment tests upon enrollment, all students are placed randomly in two first-year courses: City Seminar and Ethnographies of Work. City Seminar I, a freshman course with 10.5 weekly contact hours for 3 credits, provides the focal point for skill-building for all students, no matter their proficiency status. This allows developmental students to complete their first year with the same credits earned as other students. This paper describes the remediation approach implemented at GCC since the college’s conceptualization (in 2008) and implementation (2012) and shares key data for three cohorts of students—those who entered in 2012, 2013, and 2014—and attained proficiency while earning college credits to advance to their major courses. Retention data show that more students who are proficient at the end of the aca-

demical year are retained in the subsequent fall than those students who were not assessed as proficient.¹

By entering community college on par with proficient students, non-proficient students are positioned for success from the outset of their college education. As some research has indicated, requiring students to complete developmental coursework prior to taking college-level courses can too often lead to a “narrative of failure” for many students (Long & Boatman, 2013; Pierce, 2015). At GCC, all entering students are given an intentional first-year experience (FYE) that allows them to earn 24-30 credits. Those students who did not pass the reading and writing assessment tests upon entering the college are provided the opportunity to prepare to retake the tests during this first year (Guttman Community College, n.d.b).

This strengths-based approach to coursework is coupled with a faculty devoted to providing differentiated instruction to each student. This high-touch, high-support model allows students to experience learning as a trajectory with curricular and co-curricular opportunities focused on skill building. Importantly, “Guttman’s curriculum hits all of the hallmarks outlined in Bailey, Jaggars, and Jenkins’s (2015) guided pathways model, incorporating systematic and collaborative learning facilitation design as a nexus for innovation and student success” (Blake, 2015).

According to Brown and Kurzweil (2016), GCC is utilizing best practices to ensure that students have the opportunity to thrive. One of these best practices is the intensive summer bridge program students attend prior to the start of their first semester, during which they practice the skills they will use in their first-year coursework, as well as meet their future faculty and advisors. Another key feature in GCC’s first year is that students are placed in learning communities comprised of 75 students with a faculty member from English, mathematics, and the social science; a librarian; or an advisor assigned to each student for the entire first year. Each learning community also has graduate student coordinators who facilitate a component of City Seminar. Other best practices include mandatory full-time enrollment, combined academic and student support services, a guided pathway approach to courses, limited majors, utilization of ePortfolios to capture metacognitive learning and reflective practice, embedded support, applied learning pedagogy, opportunities for service learning and experiential activities, and a continu-

ous calendar of four sessions for students to advance their learning without interruption (Weinbaum, Rodriguez, & Bauer-Maglin, n.d.). For instance, the 2014 cohort started the 12-week Fall I cycle on September 4, after completing the required 10-day Summer Bridge (August 18-29). During the 6-week Fall II, beginning on January 4, 2015, students were able to progress with coursework, retake classes they did not successfully complete during Fall I, or take an intensive practicum in preparation for retaking the CUNY assessment tests. Spring I and Spring II followed the same 12-6-week cycle pattern. Figure 1 provides a snapshot of the First Year Experience as envisioned by the GCC FYE Steering Committee.

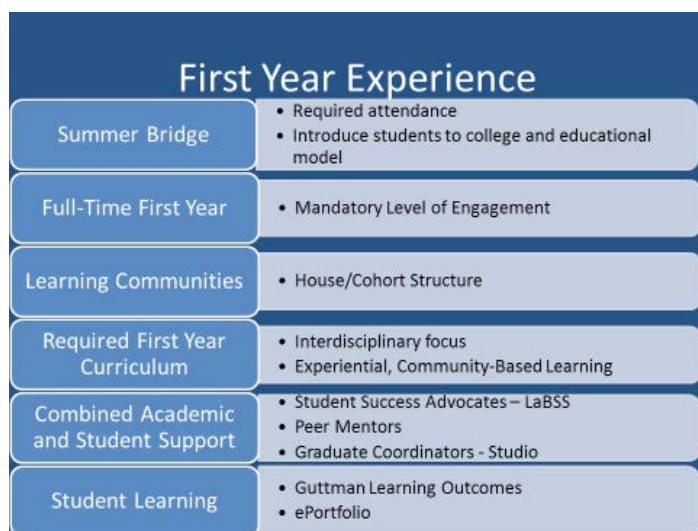


Figure 1. First Year Experience components²

The college thus creates an affirming environment, complete with extensive advisement and student support, as well as skilled faculty prepared to offer scaffolded approaches to meet course learning outcomes. The required City Seminar, offered in two parts during Fall I and Spring I of the FYE, is an example of this approach. City Seminar I is divided into four components: Critical Issue I (3 hours), Reading and Writing (3 hours), Quantitative Reasoning (3 hours), and Studio (1.5 hours)³. The course is the anchor for the learning communities and the primary space where embedded remediation occurs in the first semester. The course provides extended time-on-task for students who are not proficient in reading, writing, and/or mathematics. Each course component provides opportunities for students to practice literacy, critical thinking, and quantitative reasoning skills. The course is team-taught by three faculty members and supported by a graduate coordinator who facilitates studio.

The official course description reads:

City Seminar I emerges from the field of urban studies and takes a comparative, multidisciplinary approach to introduce students to complex global issues

such as sustainability, global economic development, and social and environmental justice. Following a critical research model, the course challenges students to examine the historical, cultural, and social contexts of urban problems; to gather and analyze evidence from multiple stakeholders and perspectives; and to propose evidence-based solutions in written, oral, and digital media formats. While each offering of the course features a specific theme, every City Seminar I builds on students' prior knowledge of the distinctive character, institutions, and socio-economic composition of New York City. To deepen students' understanding of urban life around the world, the City's physical, social, environmental, and political realities are situated in relation to other urban centers. Through its emphasis on evaluating the unevenly distributed consequences of local, national, and international policies and practices, the course equips students with the skills to conduct thoughtful, critical analyses and to develop actionable proposals responsive to specific urban circumstances. (Guttman First Year Experience Steering Committee, 2015)

Students are expected to meet the following learning outcomes (Guttman FYE Steering Committee, 2013a):

1. Describe the field of urban studies and its primary objects of study, fundamental questions, and core research strategies.
2. Demonstrate understanding of major international urban centers, including New York City, from social, cultural, historical and political perspectives.
3. Identify, interpret, and assess the perspectives of multiple stakeholders in different parts of the world on critical urban issues and evaluate the evidence supporting each position.
4. Demonstrate understanding of the policy-making process and the relative effects of policies on urban development and urban life in view of geographic, environmental, cultural and political realities.
5. Make judgments and draw conclusions based on quantitative analysis of data, while also articulating the limits of this analysis.
6. Identify and utilize key information resources in order to analyze issues and develop solutions that are responsive to specific urban circumstances.
7. Analyze differences in development and approaches to practical and policy issues undertaken in different parts of the world based on the experiences of those regions.
8. Work independently and collaboratively on classroom assignments, projects and oral presentations.
9. Present evidence-based proposals for solutions to

contemporary urban problems in written, oral, and digital media formats

Crucial to the City Seminar I curriculum are the integrated assignments that allow students to apply and connect the skills they are learning across the different components of the course. These integrated assignments are modeled on problem-based inquiry approaches and learning strategies applied to a specific theme. Themes thus far have ranged from food justice to immigration.

Embedded remediation is accomplished through the integrated skills “spines” of the course. Table 1 demonstrates excerpts of the targeted approach to skill-building,

allowing students to grasp, assess, and apply large theoretical concepts in the context of the theme (Guttman FYE Steering Committee, 2013b). In the integrated skills spines, students simultaneously acquire and develop essential skills in reading and writing, quantitative reasoning, and dealing with critical issues. In addition, these skills are practiced in studio, a space for applied learning and reflection. In reading and writing, students practice and hone foundational skills, such as annotating, summarizing, note-taking, and identifying main ideas, audience, voice, purpose, and structure. These skills are later developed through lessons on formulating a research question, thesis development, organization of ideas, revision, and peer

Table 1. Draft: City Seminar I Skills Calendar

Week	Critical Issue	Quantitative Reasoning	Reading & Writing
Week 1	ACTIVITY Introduction to concepts: mobility, accessibility, sustainability, equity	Reading and organizing data	Interacting with texts: annotate, summarize, identify main points
	SKILLS - Understand self in relation to society - Draw connections between scales	- Count, Classify and Categorize - Identify difficulties in obtaining accurate counts	- Identify main idea and supporting evidence - Summarize texts - Practice note-taking
Week 4	ACTIVITY Concepts: Interrelation of race, poverty, education, wealth. Relationship between material and social difference (<i>the core of the second cycle</i>).	Create visual representations of data. Use technologies to represent data and one’s interpretation of data.	Organize content and ideas in relation to a thesis. Ask and answer questions about what you are reading and what you are writing.
	SKILLS - Define and analyze inequalities in society - Identify context and perspective of various stakeholders in a given situation	- Observe and represent trends in data - Communicate one’s interpretation of data	- Formulate questions about texts - Develop a thesis statement and carry it through an essay
Week 9	CONTENT Understand policies in different places and interpret their effects. Concepts: policy, equity	Begin to represent data to tell a story that will become the infographic.	Organize evidence and begin to draft policy proposal.
	SKILLS - Identify discipline-specific conventions (i.e. policy) - Engage in quantitative and qualitative approaches to research	- Determine appropriateness of ways of presenting data - Analyze and utilize data to present a critical argument	- Apply understanding of paragraph and essay structure in formal writing - Use evidence to support arguments
Week 10	CONTENT Continue with research and begin to plan final policy proposal presentation.	Complete infographic project this week.	Peer review of drafts.
	SKILLS - Evaluate research sources according to applicability and reliability - Analyze and utilize data to present a critical argument	- Articulate mathematical processes orally and in writing - Communicate interpretations of data	- Engage in peer review and revision - Incorporate quotations/citations from other sources in own writing

(Guttman FYE Steering Committee, 2013b)

review. Similarly, students learn how to read, collect, classify, and organize data, and use estimation in quantitative reasoning. While developing their number sense and proportional reasoning, students also break down large conceptual frameworks by evaluating case studies through historical and contemporary lenses.

For instance, during week 4, when students identify stakeholders in Critical Issue, they also parse trends in data and learn how to interpret these in Quantitative Reasoning. In Reading and Writing, students formulate theses extrapolated from the readings and data from the other two courses while deciding how to frame the theses in a first paper that synthesizes the ideas presented in all courses. In week 9, when students learn about discipline-specific conventions in Critical Issue, they also focus on essay structure and using evidence to create effective paragraphs theme (Guttman FYE Steering Committee, 2013b). The rhythm of each course component is critical to the success of all the units because of the integrated nature of building transferrable reading and writing skills within City Seminar's contextualized, thematic setting. Faculty work intimately to ensure that each portion of the course progresses towards the signature assignments. Weekly team meetings are critical to ensure that faculty deliver on time pedagogical approaches, and that all obstacles to student success are addressed (Blake, 2015).

Early data from Guttman's Center for College Effectiveness (CCE) shows that the impact of the integrated first-year curriculum is positive. Though it is difficult to determine which elements or best practices lead to direct increase in proficiency status, it is clear that the impact of the holistic approach has produced positive results. From a preliminary evaluation of two cohorts, there is some evidence of City Seminar's impact: "for both the fall 2012 and fall 2013 cohorts, a majority of underprepared students became proficient in writing (56% and 53%, respectively) and reading (51% and 56%, respectively), by the end of their first complete fall semester" (Hertz, 2014). Student performance at the end of completion of the required first semester first-year courses show that both proficient and non-proficient students (in the mixed blend model) achieve course learning outcomes at a positive rate.⁴

When students do not reach proficiency by the end of the Fall I cycle, they have an opportunity to take a Critical Reading and Writing Practicum and one other credit-bearing course, usually Arts in New York City, Biology, Chemistry, or a course that completes their core requirements (Guttman Community College, n.d.b). Designed by the liberal arts and sciences coordinator and two English faculty members in Fall II 2012, the Critical Reading and Writing Practicum is a 36-hour immersion in learning how

to decode texts, think analytically, and represent ideas in a coherent format. The course builds on the skills that students learn in City Seminar. This intensive reading and writing course engages cross-cultural analysis of contemporary issues affecting the United States and the rest of the world. Students focus on argument construction, coherence, making relevant connections, and the use of writing which help to shape our supporting ideas. Students hone and develop skills such as juxtaposing and contrasting ideas, transitions, paraphrasing, and using quotations, while making a clear distinction between an author's opinion and their own. Although taking the practicum is required for students who need to retake the CUNY assessment test in reading and/or writing, the course is not a test prep course.

The learning outcomes expected of students completing the course are to:

1. Analyze and make connections across texts through strategies such as note taking, annotation, paraphrasing, and summarizing.
2. Access, evaluate, and synthesize information resources to support claims they make in their writing.
3. Formulate original ideas and relate them to the ideas of others.
4. Explain their writing process and employ strategies for revision and improvement of their written work based on awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses as writers.

These key learning outcomes represent transportable skills that are necessary for success in City Seminar II (the second course in the City Seminar series), Composition I, introductory major courses, and second-year courses. Students who may need to retake City Seminar I also benefit from working on these foundational and critical skills in the practicum. Data for two cohorts show that the majority of the students who enter the college non-proficient in reading (26% in 2012, 27% in 2013) and writing (29% in 2012, 26% in 2013), become proficient by the end of their first year at GCC. "With reading, the fall 2012 and fall 2013 cohorts each increased 18 percentage points from the start of the first fall semester to the end of the first year. With writing, the fall 2012 and fall 2013 cohorts increased 19 and 15 percentage points, respectively" (Hertz, 2014). In addition to gaining proficiency in reading and writing by the end of City Seminar I, or the Critical Reading and Writing Practicum, these students also progressed through the first-year curriculum, a trajectory supported by research on similar remediation models, collectively known as Accelerated Learning Programs (ALP) (Cho, Kopko, Jenkins, & Jaggars, 2012; Jenkins, Speroni, Belfield, Jaggars, & Edgecombe, 2010).

GCC is also intentional in how it serves English Language Learners (ELL). The college recognized that some of these students would remain non-proficient after taking City Seminar I and the practicum. Therefore, the college piloted two models for students who were still non-proficient in Spring I of their first year. The first model was a 4.5-hour Composition I for all non-proficient students and the second model was a free-standing 1.5-hour practicum in addition to Composition I. The main difference between the models is that students in the latter take Composition I with the learning community to which they are assigned during Summer Bridge, a mix of proficient and non-proficient students. Non-proficient students are not identified as such within the classroom, which is comprised predominantly of proficient students. The 1.5-hour practicum, taught by a full-time instructor, is a truncated, 18-hour version of the 36-hour practicum that meets during a 6-week cycle; however, the learning outcomes are the same. The critical component of the success of this design is keeping students in their learning community, and not putting all failing students together in composition. To further support this, the college administration works to ensure that the practicum is taught by a full-time faculty member to maintain consistency in curriculum delivery.

Pairing the practicum with Composition I allows students to advance towards their degree requirements while gaining the skills needed to read and write critically, which subverts the attrition and ineffectiveness that has characterized traditional remedial education (Long & Boatman, 2013; Pierce, 2015). Students are tested for reading and writing proficiency at midterm and at the end of the cycle as CUNY policy holds that they cannot earn a passing grade in Composition I if they have not passed the proficiency exam. Failure to pass affects students' ability to proceed with their course of study and therefore negatively impacts student persistence and retention.

Research shows that non-proficient students who take standard classes with proficient students benefit from the differentiated learning environment and “consistently performed better than similar students who took the highest level developmental course before enrolling in college-level English” (Cho, et al., 2012, p. 25). The integration of the non-proficient students in proficient-level Composition I, an alternative remediation practice known as “mainstreaming,” has shown increasing success at GCC, mirroring the success of this model at the Community College of Baltimore County (Cho, et al., 2012).

The early data from the 2012, 2013, and 2014 cohorts at GCC illustrate that embedded remediation is effective in direct skill-building and the application of college-level proficiencies in the context of a highly integrated, thematic first-year curriculum. Specifically, the skill-building has

focused on reading, writing and quantitative reasoning. Beyond course grades and cumulative reports of first-year success, student learning is assessed through faculty review on the mandatory assessment days built into the academic calendar, where student work is randomly selected and faculty use a norming process to assess whether course and program learning outcomes are being achieved at benchmark or beyond. Post-graduation surveys are also being conducted to gather whether students felt prepared for writing, reading, and quantitative analysis post GCC.⁵ While this preliminary analysis does not capture the students who drop out and remain non-proficient, it does indicate support for the success of GCC's embedded remediation model in facilitating the successful attainment of proficiency within the first year. Early data on post GCC enrollment continue to be promising, although it is too soon to be fully assessed.⁶

Endnotes

- 1 See student retention data and proficiency status by cohort at <https://guttman-cuny.digication.com/idea/retention>
- 2 Learning about Being a Successful Student (LaBSS) is a weekly 1.5 hour advisement session linked to Ethnographies of Work. The course is taught by the advisor assigned to the cohort and addresses soft skills and career exploration.
- 3 Studio is a mandatory 1.5 hour embedded space where students can practice the skills they are learning in City Seminar. Studio is facilitated by Graduate Coordinators who help students to work on their integrated City Seminar assignments and projects. The Graduate Coordinator is part of the student learning community.
- 4 See summative report of student academic performance by course and proficiency status at <https://guttman-cuny.digication.com/idea/academics>
- 5 These results can be found at <https://guttman-cuny.digication.com/idea/Graduates>
- 6 See summative report of 2014 graduates at <https://guttman-cuny.digication.com/idea/Graduates>

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