Articles

Giving Hope to the American Dream: Implementing a Corequisite Model of Developmental Writing

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It has been twenty-seven years since a small group of faculty at the Community College of Baltimore County, faced with the discovery that two-thirds of students placed in our upper-level basic writing course never passed first year composition, began the development of the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP), one of the earliest corequisite programs in the country. This article traces that development of the ALP model and identifies the features of ALP that have now resulted in 74% of our basic writers passing first year composition. In addition, after exploring the growing phenomenon of top-down mandates concerning basic writing, it provides guidance for departments engaged in selecting the best corequisite model for their context.

"Dev Ed" and the American Dream

Developmental education (colloquially, "dev ed") is the focal point for the American Dream. It is the most democratic segment of higher education. It is filled with students who are the first generation in their families to go to college; students who are not sure that they belong in college; students who lead very stressful lives; and, students full of hope that they will be able to improve their situation in life. It should play a crucial role in providing a pathway to success for these students, and yet, until recently, developmental education in English and math has been markedly unsuccessful at performing this important role. In school after school, state after state, studies have revealed that nearly two-thirds of students placed into *traditional* developmental education never succeed in passing even the credit-level course for which they are being prepared (Bailey et al.; Denley). In response to this sobering data, schools across the country, such as The Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) (MD), Suffolk County Community College (NY), and Butler Community College (KS), are making the move from traditional, prerequisite developmental composition courses to corequisite composition courses to improve the success rates for students placed in developmental courses.

At CCBC, the corequisite model we developed, called the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP), places student evaluated as "developmental" to, nevertheless, register for a first year composition section in which half the students are ALP students and the other half are students whose placement is first year composition. In addition, the dozen or so ALP students meet for an additional three hours each week with the same instructor. This corequisite course comprises four different activities:

- Activities designed to prepare students for what's coming next in the first year composition course;
- Activities designed to re-enforce what was just covered in the first year composition course;
- Activities that integrate reading and writing;
- Activities to address students' non-cognitive issues.

State Mandates

In recent years, there has been increasing pressure from state governments for schools to implement corequisite models. In eight states—California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and West Virginia—policies have been enacted *mandating* the adoption of corequisite approaches. Faculty are understandably skeptical when legislators, most of whom have never taught, start telling professional educators how to do their jobs. When Connecticut's PA 1240, which mandated corequisite approaches to developmental education, was enacted in 2012, my colleague, Susan Gabriel, and I worked with six colleges in the state to design and implement corequisite writing courses. The faculty from those six schools were not happy to be on the receiving end of the nation's first legislative mandate. While I shared their unhappiness, I also asked them a question: "what is the correct faculty response when a top-down mandate is actually a good idea? When it will clearly benefit students? Must we still resist?"

In Connecticut, faculty did not resist, but we did do considerable collective grumbling as we developed programs based on the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP)—a corequisite model developed at CCBC—at their six colleges, programs they became increasingly proud of when their data showed they had doubled the rate at which developmental students passed first year composition. The programs these schools adopted allowed developmental students to register for sections of first year composition in which half the students were developmental and the other half were composition level. The developmental students also registered for a corequisite course taught by the same instructor. At our final meeting, I asked the coordinators from the six schools how they were

now thinking about PA 1240. The reply I remember best was this: "I still hate top-down mandates, but without PA 1240, we never would have done this."

That reply perfectly captures my bifurcated view of such mandates. As a lifelong faculty member, I automatically oppose them and worry about the precedent they set. But as someone who has devoted his professional life to helping students achieve the success they dream of, I recognize that a mandate may be a necessary evil. At CCBC, we are quite proud of the fact that the success rate for our developmental students has increased from 38% for students in traditional, prerequisite sections to 75% for students in ALP sections (Cho et al. 7). It still took us ten years to scale up to 100%; in fact, it took eight years to reach the point where even 50% of students were taking ALP. If we had scaled ALP up to 100% after three years instead of ten, more than 3,500 students who did not pass ENG 101 would have. That is a sobering statistic enough to challenge my ingrained faculty resistance to mandates.

In addition, now that Texas (HB 2223) and California (AB 705) have climbed onto the mandate bandwagon, it seems like faculty resistance to this trend is unlikely to succeed. I would argue it is time for faculty to adopt a new strategy. If state mandates are unavoidable and if mandates requiring corequisite developmental education will result in thousands more students succeeding, I propose we stop resisting. Instead, when possible, faculty should get involved before the state issues a mandate in order to encourage two outcomes: 1) to shape the mandate in a way our professional expertise suggests will be most effective, for example, ensuring that the state mandate doesn't require schools to purchase and deploy commercial products that consist primarily of grammar drills; and 2) to ensure the mandate is accompanied by resources to support its implementation.

History of ALP

In the summer of 1998, as the Coordinator of Developmental Writing, I was startled when the program was allocated its first computer, an Apple IIe. There was no way the eight hundred students in the program could "gather around the computer" to work on their essays, so I needed to find a different use for the machine. Having recently taken a course on databases, I decided to use the computer to set up a database for all students placed in developmental writing courses and to follow them for four years. I thought I would use this longitudinal study to demonstrate the effectiveness of our program. Four years later, in 1993, I was stunned to find that the study revealed that only 33% of students who took our traditional prerequisite developmental writing course ever passed first year composition, which meant that 67% of our developmental students, at least within four years, had not passed the course for which they were being "developed."

Examining the data more closely, I realized that few students were actually *failing* courses; most were unsuccessful because they gave up—they dropped out. Seventeen percent of students who took our upper-level developmental writing course never failed anything; they passed the developmental course but then never even registered for first year composition. They gave up. Of the students who actually received a failing grade in the developmental course, most failed because they dropped out before the semester ended. Most of the two thirds of students who registered for our prerequisite developmental writing course never passed first year composition *because they gave up before they got there*.

To try to understand why this large number of students was giving up, we knew we had to ask students. We convened a series of eight focus groups at which we asked students this question: "If you had to drop out of this course at some point during the semester, which of the following would probably be the reason?" The students' responses, delivered in between bites of pizza, are listed in the middle column below. Armed with this list, over the next three years, we surveyed about two hundred students in developmental courses, asking them how likely each of the items were to be the reason if they had to drop the course before the end of the semester—on a four-item scale of not likely, somewhat likely, likely, or very likely. Data from the fall of 2010 is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Students' Reasons They Might Drop Out

	Possible Reasons for Dropping the Course	**Likely or Very Likely**
1.	financial problems	20.7%
2.	health problems	11.0%
3.	problems or changes at work	8.5%
4	transportation problems	13.3%
5.	needs of my children	11.1%
6.	problems with spouse/boy-girl friend	3.0%
7.	problems with parents or other relative I live with	7.6%
8.	psychological problems	2.5%
9.	might have trouble balancing school and work	34.2%
10.	alcohol or drug problems	1.6%
11.	might move out of state or transfer	11.6%
12.	legal problems	2.5%
13.	pregnancy or birth of child	3.1%
14.	might get too far behind	5.5%

15.	course is not for credit	3.2%
16.	course is boring	3.5%
17.	problems with the teacher	2.7%
18.	might get discouraged—find the work too hard	3.5%
19.	might decide college is not for me	2.0%

Fourteen of the nineteen reasons for dropping out (#1-14) were what are often referred to as "life issues," problems caused by students' stressful struggles to balance work, school, finances, and family. Items 18 and 19—"becoming discouraged" and "deciding college is not for me" (which is probably a face-saving way to say what I heard over and over from my students: a fear that they are not "college material")—are "affective issues," issues that do not involve their life in the outer world, but issues in their minds, in their psyches. In her important study based on five years of interviews with community college students and faculty, Rebecca Cox reports widespread fear among the more than 120 students she interviewed. "At the core of different expressions of fear," Cox reports, "were the same feelings of dread and apprehension that success in college would prove to be an unrealizable dream" (26). Many of my students also reported that they felt stigmatized by being placed in a "remedial" class. Coming to that class was embarrassing. Telling their family or friends about it was humiliating. In addition, being placed in a developmental class and being excluded from college-level classes caused many of my students to report they felt little connection or attachment to the college.

I also observed, over many years, that students often felt confused or puzzled by college terminology and protocols. Often lacking family or friends with college experience, they had no one to turn to when they did not understand what "office hours" were for, what a "rubric" was, or, most critically, how and where to ask for help.

At CCBC, we developed the Accelerated Learning Program to address these three kinds of issues, which caused many of the students in our traditional, prerequisite program to be unsuccessful. Groups of faculty developed materials and strategies designed to address the life issues that so often derailed students. We asked students to write about financial issues like payday loans or how to apply for a Pell Grant. We asked students to investigate where to go on campus to find help with specific problems, and we worked with students on managing their time for effectively. To address affective issues, we asked students, working in groups, to deconstruct the term "college material." We established activities to help students to respond effectively to setbacks, and we asked students to set both short-term and long-term goals. To address stu-

dents' lack of familiarity with college vocabulary and protocol, we developed a list of college terminology and asked students, working in groups, to write a definition of each term. We also built into the course an activity designed to improve students' ability to ask for help.

We offered our first sections of ALP in fall of 2007 and scaled up to 100% in 2016.

Dissemination

From 2011 to 2013, the ALP at CCBC was fortunate to receive significant financial support, first from the Hewlett Foundation, and later from the Kresge Foundation. These funds made it possible for Susan Gabriel and me to support the development of ALP at other schools, by offering financial support, consultation, and faculty development on their campuses. In addition, for the past decade or so, I have been able to consult with hundreds of schools at events sponsored by Complete College America, the Educational Commission of the States, and Achieving the Dream as well as at the annual conferences of CCCC and NADE/NOSS. During these years, I have worked with hundreds of schools in more than forty states to support their adoption of ALP. For these consultations, typically, I have spent one or two days on campus leading discussions of a variety of topics like the following:

- why the ALP model has been so successful;
- how to construct schedules for ALP classes so that support students' efforts in the first year composition course;
- how to create strategies to address non-cognitive issues;
- how to create strategies for integrating reading and writing;
- how to address issues with grading in corequisite courses;
- how to make effective use of active learning.

More than three hundred schools have begun implementing ALP, although it is important to point out that most of these schools have modified the model to improve its appropriateness to their local context. In fact, the malleability of ALP is one of its greatest strengths.

In the years since 2007, as a result of numerous studies (some of which involve very large numbers of students at multiple colleges) there has developed, in the developmental education community, a recognition that a corequisite approach to developmental education will greatly improve students' chances of success. A study by the Community College Research Center (CCRC) found that 74% of students placed in ALP at CCBC passed the credit-level English course. Only 38% of students taking our traditional prerequisite developmental writing course passed the credit-level course (Cho et al., 7). Tristan Denley, in the Tennessee Board of Regents Technical Brief No.3, reports that "the pass

rate for those students who took a corequisite writing class doubled over the historic 30.9 percent within an academic year to 61.8 percent" (2).

Defining success as passing the first college-level course, Complete College America reports that Georgia's corequisite approach raised the success rate for developmental students in English 101 from 16% to 71%; in West Virginia success rates went from 37% to 68%; in Indiana, from 37% to 55%; and in Colorado from 31% to 64% (Complete College America). As impressive as these numbers are, it is important to remember that they are more than just numbers; they represent the dreams of thousands of hopeful students.

The Need for Resources to Support the Transition to a Corequisite Model of Developmental Writing

The list of tasks faculty, some of whom teach five courses a semester, will need to accomplish to implement corequisite programs is discouragingly long. It is imperative that some faculty receive released time if implementation is to be effective.

At the top of the list of tasks is a rigorous program of faculty development:

- Faculty development for integrating reading and writing must be planned and delivered. English faculty will need help in developing the ability to address students' reading needs and reading faculty will need help addressing students' writing needs. In some schools, faculty development has depended primarily on workshops conducted by visiting experts. At other schools, it has consisted of a series of workshops conducted by the reading faculty for the writing faculty and by the writing faculty for the reading faculty. A few schools have been able to arrange for a reading faculty and a writing instructor to team teach for a semester, each learning from the other.
- Corequisite pedagogy relies heavily on active learning. Faculty development in this area will need to be created for those faculty not familiar with or comfortable with active learning. Again, outside experts can be brought in to lead workshops. At CCBC, we brought in Michelle Zollars from the Southern Center for Active Learning Excellence at Patrick Henry Community College (VA). Other schools have called on active learning experts on campus.
- Few faculty have any preparation to address non-cognitive issues, so additional faculty development will need to be implemented in this area. This might start with research into what challenges students report facing. Then a group of faculty can begin brainstorming approaches to addressing those challenges.

- Most corequisite models require faculty to teach the first year composition course and the corequisite course paired with it. Few faculty have had to coordinate a pair of courses like these, and the task is even harder when a different instructor teaches the corequisite section. Many faculty will require assistance developing well-coordinated courses.

In addition, there are myriad logistical and administrative tasks requiring attention:

- A specific corequisite model will need to be agreed upon.
- New course proposals will have to be written, agreed to, and approved by a curriculum committee or faculty senate whose members may need convincing that corequisites are a good idea.
- At many schools, previously separate Reading and English Departments must be either merged or must work out an organizational arrangement that allows for the integration of reading and writing.
- Counselors and advisors will have to be informed of the new approach so they can explain it to students and help them register for the appropriate courses.
- Records and registration will need to be consulted so that a system can be developed that ensures the right students and the right balance of students register for each section of each course.
- Institutional Research will need to be consulted so that data is produced to help evaluate the program and modify any parts that don't seem to be working.
- Coordination with the developmental math faculty will be necessary to help ensure that part-time students will not be required to register for six credits of English and six credits of math in their first semester.
- At schools where classrooms are in short supply, some way to avoid having a class of ten or twelve corequisite students occupying a classroom designed for thirty will need to be developed.

Too often, the state mandates I discussed earlier require implementation of a corequisite model by a certain date but provide few or no resources to support that implementation. For example, in California, Katie Hern reports, in *Getting There II: A Statewide Progress Report on Implementation of AB 705,* that "a key source of funding for this work—the state's Basic Skills and Student Outcomes Transformation Program—ended, just as colleges were gearing up for AB 705, and no additional state funding has been earmarked to help colleges make the dramatic shifts the law requires" (24). Given current college budget shortfalls and little or no support from the state, individual institutions facing a mandated change, too often, look for a way to implement the mandate that is

least expensive and least disruptive. As a result, some schools are implementing corequisite models that are not robust enough to produce the dramatic improvements in success rates we all hope for. At the least robust end of the range of models being adopted is this: all students are placed in English 101, and those needing help are told to go to the Writing Center or to a computer lab. But, a little definitional housekeeping: in a corequisite model, students who need support in order to succeed in the credit-level writing course, must be allowed to register for that course and then receive that support *concurrently*. A model that has students taking a developmental course that meets six hours a week for eight weeks and then taking the credit-level course six hours a week for the second eight weeks is *not* a corequisite model. The support the students need is not delivered concurrently with the credit level course. This is a *prerequisite* model squeezed into one semester. Given these pressures, it may be useful to lay out a number of corequisite models already extant across the country.

Four Corequisite Models

The following list, gathered from my observations, may give faculty seeking to develop the most effective corequisite model for their context, for their college's policies and preferences, and for their students, a sense of the range of options available. In the diagrams that follow, students who have been placed into credit-level courses are represented wearing purple sweaters and shirts. Students who have been placed into developmental courses are represented wearing green sweaters and shirts.

Fast Track or Stretch Model

Developmental students register for a six-hour (or fewer) course with one instructor. The class comprises developmental students only. The course blends the developmental material and the college-level material.

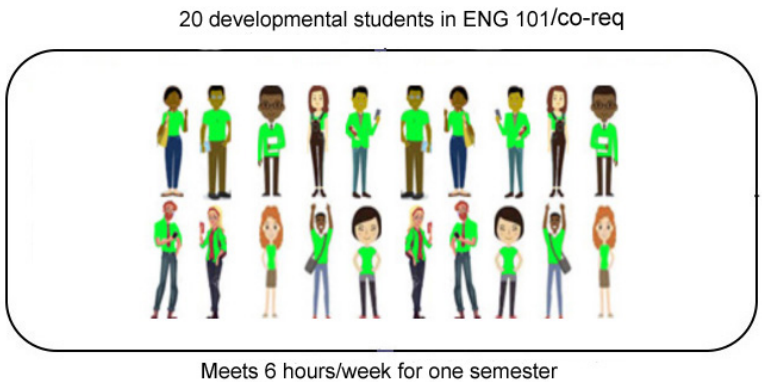

Figure 1: The Fast Track Mode

The Studio Model

Developmental students register for a three-credit college-level course where they are mixed with an equal or greater number of college-level students. In addition, they register for a one-hour studio course with students from a variety of other courses requiring writing. At each studio session students present drafts, they are working on and receive feedback from other students, much as art students do in an art studio.

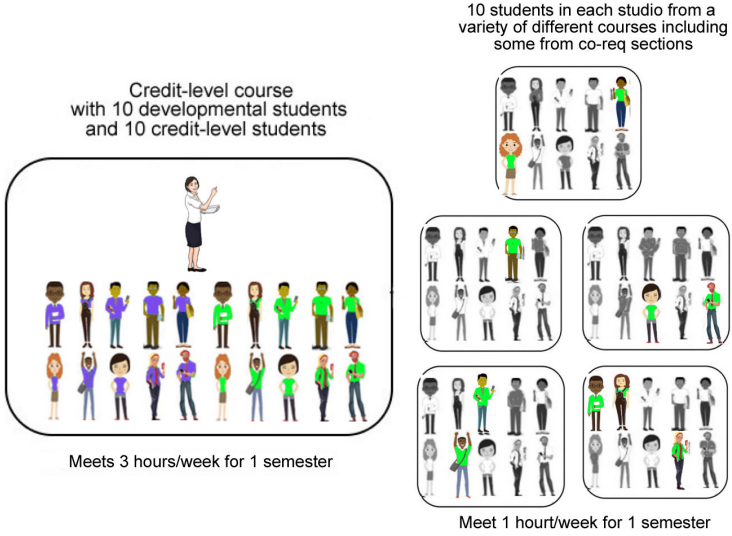

Figure 2: The Studio Model

Tutoring Model

All students are enrolled in a credit level course. Developmental support is offered through the Writing Center or a computer lab. At its best, this model makes use of materials developed by the writing faculty and/or tutors trained so they are aware of the curriculum and requirements in the first year composition class. Many schools report a lack of student visits to the computer lab or Writing Center if such visits are not required.

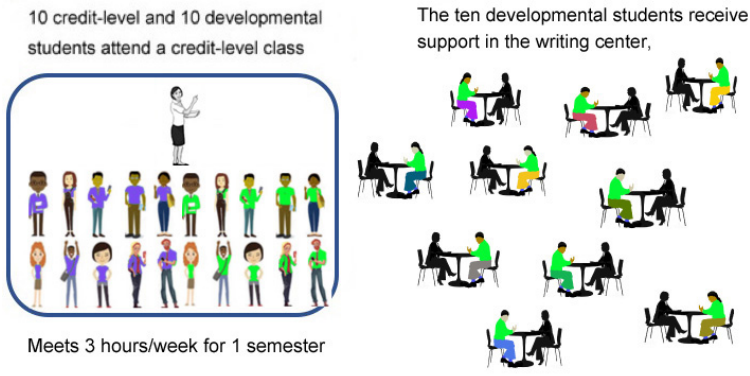

Figure 3: The Tutoring Model

Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) Model

Ten developmental students join an equal or larger number of college-ready students in a 3-hour per week ALP section of the credit-level course. The students who are not yet college ready also register for an ALP developmental section for an additional 3 hours per week. At some schools, the support class meets for fewer than three hours per week. At other schools the support class is taught by a different instructor.

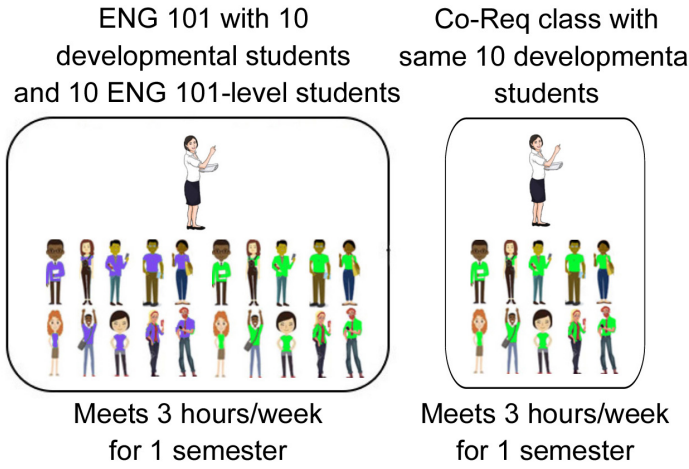

Figure 4: ALP Model

Seven Characteristics of Effective Corequisite Courses

Based on the focus groups and student surveys I conducted from 2008 through 2012 and on conversations over the past eleven years with corequisite writing faculty I have worked with in colleges across the country, I have identified seven tasks that corequisite programs need to address in order to improve student success. These seven tasks are listed below and for each I have spelled out the features of corequisite models that address the task.

Task 1: The model must effectively address the non-cognitive issues that cause so many students to drop out.

Features:

- Faculty development like that described earlier is provided to prepare instructors to address these issues.
- Class size is small enough for faculty to really know their students. At CCBC, our class size for the corequisite course is ten. Many schools are having similar success with a class size of twelve, but schools with larger class sizes report difficulties.

- Classes meet for enough time to allow non-cognitive issues to be addressed. Traditional developmental writing courses require three hours a week to teach writing alone. Corequisite courses cover equivalent writing material but have added responsibility for addressing reading and non-cognitive issues. It appears that offering a corequisite course for fewer than three hours per week would produce reduced success rates.

Task 2: The model must confirm for students that they are college material and that they belong in college. Under traditional, prerequisite models, students, who too often arrive in college with doubts about whether they are "college material," whether they belong in college, are told, too often based on a questionable instrument like Compass or Accuplacer, receive the message that we are also not sure they belong in college. They are barred from taking a college-level course and instead are required to prove they are "college material" by passing a developmental class that feels more like seventh grade than college. This experience only exacerbates any insecurities students arrive with.

Under a corequisite model, developmental students receive a very different message. They are placed into a college-level writing class and told that they will be supported by a corequisite class to make sure they can succeed.

Feature:

- Students are enrolled in the college-level writing course.

Task 3: The model must shorten the pipeline through which students must pass in order to pass the credit-level writing course.

Features:

- Students are able to complete their college-level writing course and their developmental work in one semester.
- Reading and writing are integrated into one course.

Task 4: The stigma students feel when identified as needing extra support must be mitigated.

Features:

- Corequisite students are in the college-level course along with students evaluated as college-ready.
- In the corequisite course, students are reading college-level texts and writing college-level essays.

Task 5: The model should strengthen students' attachment to the college, their sense that they belong.

Features:

- Students are in a small cohort that spends considerable time together.
- In class, they are frequently working in groups enhancing the bonding that improves attachment.

Task 6: The model must encourage and support faculty in adopting more effective pedagogy.

Feature:

- Instructors are provided with rigorous faculty development opportunities to assist them with any aspect of corequisite teaching that they are not comfortable with. This may include, for example, integrating reading and writing, active learning/group work, addressing non-cognitive issues.

Task 7: The model must support students as they struggle with challenges in the credit-level writing course.

Features:

- Corequisite sections have small class size.
- Corequisite sections meet enough hours per week to address reading, writing, and non-cognitive issues.
- Corequisite sections are taught by the same instructor as the paired credit section.

Based on the seven tasks listed above, I have developed the following checklist which could be useful as English departments attempt to decide on which of the corequisite models is both feasible and robust. In the first column, I have indicated which of the above tasks is addressed by each feature. In the second column are listed the features I identified as necessary to accomplish each task, in the third column are suggestions for scoring models for each feature, and in the fourth column is a place to record the score.

Table 2: Checklist for Evaluating the Robustness of Corequisite Models

Task characteristics supported by each feature	**Feature**	**Scoring**	**Score**
2, 3, 4	students are enrolled in the college-level writing course	yes = 4 no = 0	
4	students are not required to do work that feels like a repeat of 7th grade work (backward curriculum design from the composition class)	0 to 4	
3, 6	integrated reading and writing, at least in the coreq class	both 101 and coreq = 4 coreq only = 3 none = 0	
4	coreq students are in a 101 class with 101-level students	yes = 4 no = 0	
5, 6	active learning employed frequently, at least in the coreq class	frequently in both 101 & coreq = 4 less frequently in both = 3 frequently in coreq only = 2 infrequently in coreq = 1 none = 0	
5	coreq students in a cohort that spends extended time together	6 hours/ week (101 + coreq) = 4 5 hours/ week (101 + coreq) = 3 4 hours/ week (101 + coreq) = 2 coreq students meet together only in 101 = 0	

Task characteristics supported by each feature	Feature	Scoring	Score
1, 5, 7	small class size for coreq class	<13 = 4 14-15 = 3 >15 = 0	
1, 6	faculty development provided to help instructors feel comfortable with the logistics and the pedagogy of a corequisite model	instructors well prepared = 4 instructors somewhat prepared = 3 instructors not prepared = 0	
7	same instructor for both classes	yes = 4 no = 0	
7	coreq section meets for enough time to address reading, writing, and non-cognitive issues	3 hours = 4 2 hours = 3 1 hour = 1 0 hours, students referred to tutoring = 0	

Evaluating the robustness of various models under consideration may help faculty to reach consensus, and it may also help in negotiations with their administrations, which, in some cases, may be pushing the adoption of a less expensive or less disruptive model. It should be extremely helpful in these negotiations for English faculty to be able to demonstrate that the model they prefer is more robust and will produce stronger results.

Many schools today are in the process of adopting a corequisite model either because they are convinced doing so will help their students succeed or because of a top-down mandate or, sometimes, both. Usually, the faculty working on this major innovation are doing so while they are still expected to perform all or most of their regular responsibilities. As they attempt to read the scholarship, attend conferences, examine data, find time to meet, discuss, reach consensus, and then convince their colleagues of their decision, they are still teaching classes, grading papers, and serving on committees. It is a daunting task. It requires a serious commitment of time and energy. But our students deserve nothing less. Doubling the percentage of students who are successful

will have an important impact on our students' lives and on our society as well. Our commitments to social justice and equity leave us no option.

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