

February 16, 1999

MEMORANDUM

TO: Presidents

FROM: Brenda H. Rogers
Vice President for Administration

SUBJECT: Passing Rate for Developmental Courses

At the January meeting of the North Carolina Association of Community College Presidents (NCACCP), I presented the measures and standards recommended by the Performance Measures and Standards Task Force for use in performance funding. Because of concerns expressed about the standard of 70% passing rate for all developmental courses, Bill Lewis asked that I survey the colleges to obtain data on grade distributions in developmental courses.

After discussing the request with staff, we decided to use the new developmental tracking program that was designed for Academic and Student Services and developmental studies staff to address reporting requirements. The computer program was in the process of being tested but had not been fully implemented. After a couple of attempts at collecting the data from the colleges, we received usable data from 46 colleges. We apologize for the short turn-around time and for the difficulty with the program. In essence, we field tested the program with all of our colleges and uncovered some problems in the process.

Let me briefly summarize the data that we collected.

The developmental tracking system collects data on students who complete developmental courses. Grades of A, B, C, D, F, and P are reported. The instructions were to use the P for passing when a pass/fail grading system is used. However, we do not believe that these instructions were followed in the data submitted. Bill Lewis checked the data for Isothermal and concluded that the P for his college was used to designate progress within level. Another problem is that we do not know the policies regarding grades of D: Are students allowed to move to the next course with a grade of D? Given these questions, we limited the classification of passing to grades of A, B, and C.

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Given that very conservative definition of passing, the overall passing rate in developmental courses for the 46 colleges was 70.7%. Of the 46 colleges, 17 would not meet the standard of 70% passing rate. When we analyzed the data by course prefix, 16 of the 46 colleges had average grades in English falling below 70%; 19 had average grades in math falling below 70%; and 16 colleges had average grades in reading below 70%.

In consultation with Bill Lewis and System Office staff, we decided to keep the 70% passing rate as the standard with the understanding that the measures and standards will be reviewed carefully after the first year. I believe that we will have an overall average passing rate for the System that is greater than 70% because many of the Ps were valid passing grades and because Ds are considered passing at some of the colleges.

I will ask a group representing developmental education instructors/program directors and System Office staff to develop operational definitions and procedures for collecting and analyzing the data for the two developmental education measures.

I appreciate the colleges responding to our urgent request for data on grade distributions in developmental courses and apologize for the problems encountered in executing the program. As a result of this test of the developmental tracking program, we have a clearer understanding of the issues that must be addressed in order to collect and analyze the data.

BHR:sh

c: President Martin Lancaster
Performance Measures and Standards Task Force

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