



A Promising Corequisite Outreach and Support Model at Houston Community College

This summary is part of the Charles A. Dana Center's "Notes from the Field" series, which highlights examples of innovative mathematics education practices from colleges, universities, and systems.

TAKEAWAYS

- *In the flurry of incoming information at the start of a semester, students are not always aware of all available supports and may be hesitant to actively seek them out.*
- *An early, coordinated effort creates meaningful interactions and better connections among advisors, faculty, and students.*
- *Student-focused support can reveal issues before they become unmanageable and can create opportunities to improve students' confidence and promote self-advocacy.*

Introduction

The transformation of developmental education by legislative decree and institutional reforms has been expanding across the country for well over a decade.^{1, 2} Evidence continues to mount that providing just-in-time assistance in the form of corequisite support courses is helping students succeed in completing their gateway mathematics courses in their first year,³ which has long been a major stumbling block for students who have been designated as underprepared for college-level work.

Houston Community College has taken this reform a step further, crafting and refining a holistic student support structure that increased the number of students making it to and through college-level mathematics.

Background

In Fall 2020, Houston Community College (HCC) enrolled 38,020 students,⁴ an 18% drop from the previous five years, likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Eighty-one percent of enrolled students were part time. HCC is an open-enrollment institution with a diverse student body: 36% Hispanic, 27% African American, 14% White, and 23% international and other groups. A significant number of students enroll at HCC after a long hiatus from formal education settings and have job and family obligations in addition to their school workload.

In 2017, the Texas Legislature passed House Bill 2223, which mandated a phase-in of corequisite supports as well as the development of a plan of action for students who fail those corequisite courses. HCC fully scaled its developmental education structure to align with HB 2223.⁵ The college offers corequisite support courses for four gateway math courses: College Algebra, Mathematics for Business, Contemporary Math, and Elementary Statistical Methods. The support course is scheduled either immediately before or after the college-level course in the student's day.

This increased credit load, however, makes failing one or both courses a larger burden to overcome for students who require corequisite support. This obstacle, combined with the action plan requirement in HB 2223, spurred the college to reconsider how to best identify and support struggling students early enough in the semester to keep them on a path to success.

Strategies

In 2020, HCC formed the Corequisite Remediation Committee to begin addressing the additional requirement of HB 2223 to create "preventive, proactive, holistic, and coordinated" institutional supports. The committee's initial work revealed the need to involve faculty, advisors, and other student services personnel at key points and in ways that would be most beneficial to student outcomes.



Shameka Reed (standing)

The college already has robust supports available in the form of free online and in-person tutoring, a library with computer labs as well as equipment to check out, counseling and mental health services, career services, financial aid, and basic needs resources such as food and housing assistance. These supports are documented in orientation information and course syllabi presented to all students; however, in the flurry of activity that accompanies the start of a new semester, many students are not aware of or do not take advantage of these resources and services.

The committee wanted to ensure that students, especially those showing signs of being at risk of failing, are reminded of these supports early in the semester to get help with their specific challenges before their grades became too low to fix.

The Corequisite Remediation Committee recommended a holistic support approach, identifying different ways to help students at various points in the semester based on each student's challenges. One way was to strongly encourage faculty to make direct connections with their students within the first few weeks of the semester, especially with those who were absent, missing assignments, or performing poorly on assessments. As part of the process to mitigate unsuccessful completion and to address student needs that were impacting students' academic performance, faculty were instructed to complete a midsemester report on all students with a grade of D or lower and to meet with these students to review actions to address their challenges.

Another strategy included student support services and amplified the intervention impact through intentional, targeted redundancy. Students with a grade of D or lower were asked to attend a midsemester “reset workshop” with Academic Advising. The goal of the workshop was to assist in support alignment with the needs identified by the faculty and the student to decrease the probability of unsuccessful completion and to build agency.

The workshop reviewed available resources and provided tips for time management and study skills. Students attending the reset workshops submitted questions in advance, allowing advisors time to address specific concerns.

The workshops were piloted in Summer 2021 and then offered at scale in Fall 2021. After conducting several workshops, it became clear that a member of the math faculty should be included to answer questions related to classroom norms and procedures. Student attendance of the first few workshops were less than optimal due largely to the newness of the process, but there is optimism that this additional touchpoint will have a meaningful impact on student success.

Another part of the holistic support approach was the information garnered from end of semester reports, which faculty complete for students who fail their college-level math course. This end of course report populates an Individualized Study Plan (ISP) for the student, who then reviews it with their advisor. The ISP uses a decision tree to identify a path to future success in the college-level course based on whether the student failed both the corequisite support course and the college-level course, and how many of the college-level course learning outcomes were met. Based on faculty input and advisor recommendation, the student may be required to re-enroll in the corequisite and college-level course combination; re-enroll in the college-level course; take a stand-alone, pre-college level course; or complete a set of assignments and retake the final assessment for the college-level course (at the discretion and recommendation of the instructor). A final progress report form, which would be available for future faculty to review and add notes, continues to track each student’s progress after the Corequisite Remediation Plan intervention is complete.

Information from the midsemester and end of course reports will inform HCC’s efforts to refine and improve the Corequisite Remediation Plan process. The information will also help to continuously improve the broader student services offerings at the college.

Initial Impact

The Corequisite Remediation Plan thus far has shown to be an effective way to connect students to the wide array of available academic and non-academic supports throughout the semester. Sherry Liu, program coordinator for the Developmental Mathematics Department, noted that the emphasis on encouraging faculty to have genuine conversations with their students early is a key difference in the new approach. Although HCC has a longstanding Early Alert system in which faculty notify advisors when students are struggling, the subsequent advisor outreach did not always yield the desired intervention outcomes, perhaps because the student and the advisor did not have an existing relationship. In the new approach, however, instructors will have had early personal interactions with students. Consequently, their conversations may be more meaningful and may reveal myriad reasons why students are struggling—for example, because they do not know how to access online textbooks, are dealing with significant personal matters, etc.

“The workshops are really about helping students help themselves, not demanding more from them.”

Melinda Mejia
Co-chair, Corequisite Remediation Committee
Instructor, English and Humanities



Sherry Liu



“With some of these students, it’s really hard for them. . . . There is stuff going on in their life that is causing chaos and life just kind of takes over,” observed Liu. “Any way that we can interact with students can be helpful to them, letting them know someone is looking out for them.” Advising Manager Shameka Reed saw a decrease in Early Alert system notifications to advisors, recognizing that “professors are initiating conversations with students” and helping students handle the classroom issues themselves.



Melinda Mejia

Melinda Mejia, co-chair of the Corequisite Remediation Committee, recognized that advisors’ and instructors’ personal encouragement during the reset workshops also made a difference. “The workshops feel much more like support,” Mejia said. Students were encouraged to advocate for themselves, take advantage of the many resources available to them, and develop deeper connections with their advisors and instructors.

Reed saw a positive byproduct in the timing of the pandemic and HCC’s rollout of the enhanced corequisite supports. Both faculty and students struggled with the transition to online learning, and this shared struggle made some faculty more aware of the lives of their students outside of the classroom. “When COVID hit, it made everybody think outside of the box,” Reed shared, as current circumstances uncovered the complexities of everyone’s lives, including those of faculty, whose jobs and own children’s schooling were also disrupted. The shared experience resulted in faculty’s being “more open-minded about helping” students and giving them flexibility when unexpected challenges arose.

Conclusion

Houston Community College already had rich supports that holistically address student needs, but its new corequisite remediation approach included reset workshops and other interventions, such as midsemester and end of course reports, that demonstrate an auspicious start to promote student success, especially during difficult times. The new approach also supports students in identifying and seeking the appropriate campus resources that they need when they need them.

Informal feedback from students who participated in a reset workshop has been positive. Additionally, students who created a strategy alongside an advisor and instructor, noted Mejia, have much greater investment in the outcome and the co-created strategy feels like a plan for success for students rather than yet another hurdle to overcome.

Endnotes

¹ <https://reportcenter.highered.texas.gov/agency-publication/miscellaneous/faq-hb-2223-tsi-de/>

² <https://www.utdanacenter.org/blog/arkansas-colleges-and-universities-working-together-statewide-student-success-goals>

³ https://completecollege.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/CCA_NoRoomForDoubt_CorequisiteSupport.pdf

⁴ <https://reportcenter.highered.texas.gov/agency-publication/almanac/2021-texas-public-higher-education-almanac/>

⁵ <https://reportcenter.highered.texas.gov/reports/data/crs-developmental-education-overview/>

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