



Remediation in Maryland Higher Education

Series Summary

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Remediation in Maryland Higher Education: Policy Report Series Overview

A substantial percentage of students entering postsecondary education each year are found to be unprepared for college-level work, primarily in math, English, or reading. These content areas are critical for student success in higher education. This trend has stayed relatively constant, nationally and in Maryland, over the past 25 years despite ongoing demographic shifts in enrollments and efforts to provide support. Remedial education – also called “developmental education” or “remediation” – is designed to bridge the skills gap and prepare students for college-level work.

Over the past two years, the Maryland Higher Education Commission has produced a series of reports concerning remediation in Maryland public higher education institutions.¹ The research conducted in this report series addresses a number of policy concerns connected to remediation, as well as a number of national, state, and institutional initiatives currently underway that have been designed to increase student success. Long a subject of keen interest to institutions and policymakers alike, remediation has seen a renewed interest in recent years, and changes to policy and practice have taken several forms. For example, Maryland higher education institutions are increasingly adopting corequisite models of remedial instruction: corequisite models allow students to take a credit-bearing course in the remedial subject while also receiving the additional supports that may have been traditionally offered in developmental classes. There have also been a number of interventions at the state level that have attempted to address concerns tied to remediation. In particular, the Career and College Readiness and College Completion Act (CCRCCA), passed in 2013, impacted the way that remedial education was intended to function and, along with a number of other policies regarding curriculum and registration, act as a driver of student success.¹

The briefs contained in this series further include data analyses surrounding questions regarding remedial education in Maryland: who is assessed to need remediation, who enrolls in and completes both remedial and credit-bearing courses, how first-year outcomes vary by developmental status, and how persistence and completion rates vary across those same populations.² The report series answers the following questions:

Who needs remediation when they enroll in Maryland postsecondary education?

- A substantial number of students enrolling for the first time in both Maryland’s community colleges and four-year public colleges and universities are assessed to need remediation when entering postsecondary education, although this need is much greater at community colleges than at four-year institutions.

¹ Parts 1 through 6 of the report series can be found on the Office of Research and Policy Analysis website, <https://mhec.maryland.gov/publications/Pages/research/index.aspx>.

² The three developmental status categories are: 1) college ready, 2) those assessed to need remediation and take required courses in their first year, and 3) those assessed to need remediation who *do not* take the required courses in their first year.

- The need for remedial coursework exists across all races/ethnicities, genders, and age groups, although there are wide variances across subgroups.

Do students complete required remedial courses within their first year of enrollment? Are completion rates different among segments and course subjects?

- Almost half of full-time students assessed to need remedial work prior to completing credit-bearing courses fail to complete it within their first year.
- First-time, full-time undergraduate students at community colleges are both assessed to need remediation at rates much higher than at four-year institutions *and* much less likely to complete remedial courses in their first year of enrollment.
- Community colleges students are equally likely to complete remedial courses in math as in English in the first year, while at four-year institutions, students are much more likely to complete assigned remedial work in math than in English.

Do first-time, full-time students complete credit-bearing courses in math and English within the first year? ⁱⁱ Do coursetaking patterns differ for those who are deemed “college ready” versus those who are assessed to need remediation?

- A sizable portion of first-time, full-time students – whether they are identified as college ready or in need of remediation – are failing to complete credit-bearing math and English courses within their first year of enrollment. Nearly two-thirds of community college students and nearly one-third of four-year public college and university students fail to complete a credit-bearing math course within the first year, and approximately one-third of students at both types of institutions fail to complete a credit-bearing English course within the first year of enrollment.
- Among students identified as needing remediation who complete their assigned remedial courses in the first year, many fail to take the associated credit-bearing course in a timely manner; this pattern bears out at both community colleges and public four-year institutions.
- Despite the findings noted above, approximately one-third of students manage to complete both the remedial *and* associated credit-bearing courses within the first year. This shows that while one common criticism of remediation – that it impedes students’ timely progression towards a degree by requiring additional courses – may prove true in many cases, some students still find ways to meet these important milestones.
- Some students who were assessed to need remedial coursework were successful in completing the related credit-bearing courses *without* completing the associated developmental course. This means that some students skipped the required remedial course and, instead, enrolled in and successfully completed the credit-bearing course.

How do first-year outcomes vary for students when analyzed by the three categories of developmental status?

- Students who entered their institution as “college ready” were much more likely to meet a 24- or 30-credit threshold by the end of their first year than students requiring remedial courses in colleges and universities (regardless of whether or not the student actually completed the remedial coursework).
- The more terms in which a student enrolls, the more credits they accumulate. Across all remedial statuses, students who enrolled in the summer term in particular were most likely to meet a 24- or 30-credit threshold.
- Students who completed the remedial courses as assigned were more likely to meet a 24-credit threshold in their first year than those who needed remedial courses but did not complete them.
- Students who completed remedial courses as assigned were nearly as likely as students who initially enrolled “college ready” to meet a 2.0 GPA threshold in their first year. Among students who did not complete required remedial courses, the percentage meeting the 2.0 GPA threshold was much lower than either group.

Of those first-time, full-time students assigned to the three developmental status categories, who returns for a second year?

- Students who were assigned to remedial coursework and completed it are retained at nearly identical rates to their peers who entered as college-ready.
- At both community colleges and public four-year institutions, students who were assessed to need remediation and did *not* complete it were much less likely to return to college the subsequent fall than both those who entered the institution “college ready” and those who needed remediation and completed it.
- Low second-year retention rates among those students who failed to complete assigned remediation are foreshadowed by their substantially lower rates of fall-to-spring retention within the first year; these students are at higher risk of not being retained term-to-term and year-to-year.

A number of policy implications and recommendations have emerged from the work contained in these series. These include:

Ensuring students that need remedial interventions obtain necessary educational supports and are accurately placed in required courses:

- Data show that many of those students requiring remediation enroll directly after high school. Maryland K-12 systems and higher education institutions should continue to evaluate both the best ways to ensure that students are prepared for college-level work and the best ways to assess their readiness.ⁱⁱⁱ

- The existence of students who are identified to need remedial work, who fail to complete it while subsequently succeeding in credit-bearing coursework, is evidence that there may be mismatches between placement and assessment standards and students' readiness for college-level coursework. Institutions should continue to monitor the tools that are used to assess whether students require developmental assistance.
- Institutions should ensure that they are implementing targeted interventions for those groups most disproportionately impacted by the need for remediation.
- Institutions should continue to evaluate whether there may be alternative methods of teaching students, such as co-requisite remediation, that may be less burdensome on students than traditional remediation but still encourage student success. As these methods are implemented, institutions should also work to evaluate the efficacy and efficiency of these interventions to best ensure they are meeting student and institutional needs.

Institutions should develop or enhance ways of encouraging and incentivizing completion of critical courses in a timely manner regardless of remedial status:

- Academic advising should address the need for early completion of both remedial and credit-bearing courses, which play a critical role in student progression toward a degree.
- Data from this series show that meeting the credit and grade point average thresholds to make satisfactory academic progress and meet state and federal aid program requirements are difficult for many first-time, full-time undergraduate students within the constraints of two terms of enrollment.
- Federal, state and institutional financial aid programs should consider the best ways of incentivizing and supporting enrollment during the summer term so that students have the necessary financial assistance to enroll during that time. The use of programs such as summer Pell should be encouraged as a way to keep students on track to timely completion.
- At the state level, there should be renewed examination of whether thresholds – particularly credit accumulation thresholds – established to maintain eligibility for some financial aid programs prove the most effective mechanism to encourage momentum.

While this report series is concluded, the Maryland Higher Education Commission will continue to focus its resources and energy on better understanding the best ways to encourage student success and completion. This work began with a 2021 report regarding assessment practices used to place students into remedial courses and the ways in which those practices are validated. The Commission also continues to engage with institutions on best practices for the delivery of remedial work, including the implementation of corequisite models of course delivery, providing additional supports, and the use of tools

such as pathways to ensure students are preparing for the coursework most relevant to their major.

Remediation in Maryland Higher Education report series:

[Part 1: What is Remediation, and Why Does It Matter?](#)

[Part 2: Remedial Assessment at Maryland Colleges and Universities](#)

[Part 3: Remedial Course Completion within the First Year of Enrollment](#)

[Part 4: Credit-Bearing Course Completion within the First Year of Enrollment](#)

[Part 5: First-Year Outcomes](#)

[Part 6: Second-Year Retention](#)

ⁱ <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2013RS/bills/sb/sb0740e.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Maryland's CCRCCA outlined expectations that first-time full-time college students should complete their first credit bearing "gateway" math and English courses within the first year of enrollment.

ⁱⁱⁱ In part to address the expectations laid forth in CCRCCA, the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, legislation passed in 2021, contains a number of requirements regarding standards for college preparation. For more information, see: <https://www.marylandpublicschools.org/Blueprint/Pages/CCR.aspx>.