

I Want You to Know

As you all know, the completion agenda along with the push of several organizations has brought great scrutiny to the field of developmental education, often confusing it with stand-alone remediation, often calling for its demise, often confusing what we do with babysitting, reteaching” what they should have learned in high school,” and all sorts of half-truths, untruths, and smatterings of truth just to be confusing. However, out of all this mess, we innovative educators have come up with refining practices that actually do work to help students succeed, and one of those is corequisite courses.

Corequisite Course: students take a college-level course concurrently with a smaller “remedial” support course

Yes, corequisite courses do work for some students when implemented correctly. Corequisite courses work when they shorten the amount of time for life to get in the way which is the primary reason many of our students leave us too soon, and they work when they are closely aligned with college level work both in content and rigor. It also helps, needless to say, when they are limited to students who test at the highest level of cut scores because of our inadequate placement practices, but that is another discussion.

I have taught corequisite English 101 classes myself for over ten years with incredible results. Who could not? My students self-selected, there were only 12 of them in the adjunct class; and I taught both classes. My success rates were in the 90th percentile, but let’s face it—I could have had them all succeed had I really wanted to. All grading is, at its heart, subjective. I did track subsequent scores for ENG102, and my students’ scores were comparable with students who were in ENG102 directly from a regular 101 class. But that was a very small *n*.

Corequisite courses do work, but...

Corequisite courses do work, but as Belfield, Jenkins, and Lahr (2016) noted, “The corequisite model has not yet been subjected to rigorous evaluation” (p. 8). And until it is, I am reluctant to recommend that any college or system or state eliminate developmental education options for corequisite courses alone for the following reasons:

1. Students who do not test into college level classes often need more than to refresh academic skills. If academic remediation were the only issue, then our lives and their lives would be much easier. That is not the case. In my own experience, my corequisite ENG class morphed quickly from addressing English skills to addressing self-efficacy, time management, self-confidence, and emotional intelligence skills. For some students, a semester of academic remediation is simply not enough to ensure their success in college-level courses.

2. Students do not all learn at the same pace. Although some students simply need a refresher, others need more. The institution must change to meet the diverse students' needs, not the other way around. We are not born in batches with "best educated by" dates on our feet. All people learn at different rates and need different options to accommodate those.

3. I will be more convinced by corequisite success rates when the regular class and the corequisite classes are taught by different teachers. Just saying. I know we have ethical hearts; I know we have good hearts.

4. I also want to see subsequent pass rates. Do these success rates represent real learning over time?

5. Finally, I am unimpressed with the "incredible" pass rates I hear from proponents of "corequisite-for-all" models. The highest pass rate I have heard them tout so far is 61%.

6. And let's talk about the real issue: students' lives. When I hear those success rates, all I think of are the 39% to 49% of students who were mandated to go into the corequisite class and really needed another option; who failed—who were set up to fail because they were not ready for college level work—and who may very well leave thinking college is not for them.

Yes, corequisite courses work for some. But we must tread carefully in our implementation—

HAD I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

W.B. Yeats (1865–1939)
"He Wishes For the Cloths of Heaven"
from the *Collected Works of W.B. Yeats*

Belfield, C., Jenkins, D., & Lahr, H. (2016). *Is corequisite remediation cost-effective? Early findings from Tennessee*. (CCRC Research Paper No. 62). New York, NY: Columbia University Teachers College, Community College Research Center.

