

## **Exploring Developmental Education: Ivy Online Faculty Reflections on Reform**

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**[Abstract]** In this collaboratively authored piece, authors examine the impact of the developmental education reform movement from the perspective of administrative community college faculty leading a large, centralized online unit at a statewide institution. This piece explores the individual, discipline-specific perspectives of a diverse group of liberal arts chairs as they reflect on published research and the ways their area—including student performance as well as faculty labor and attitudes—and shifts in developmental course access and placement. Additionally, the piece explores the relationship between online course outcomes; the impact of online modality; and student preparedness and under-preparedness.

**[Keywords]** developmental education, asynchronous instruction, reform, community college student success, co-requisite courses

## 1. Introduction

College students are increasingly choosing online courses, especially in two-year college open access institutions (TYCOAs). But understanding college-level content is complex, and instruction, especially online, can be fast-paced and text-dense for students. Growing online course enrollment is complicated by the reverberations of developmental education reforms. Recently, the authors of this piece—administrative faculty working within the online unit at a TYCOA—collectively set out to learn more about developmental education reform and its impact on online students.

The authors of this article work within *IvyOnline*, the asynchronous online delivery hub at Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana, the nation's largest singly accredited community college. IvyOnline is led by teams of administrative faculty, including a School-specific Faculty Lead (FL) similar to a dean, and discipline-specific Assistant Faculty Leads (AFLs) like department chairs. The authors of this piece provide leadership for IvyOnline's largest school—Arts, Sciences, and Education (ASE)—and form the ASE Leadership Team.

The ASE Leadership team meets weekly for research sessions which include presentations on relevant scholarships and course outcomes. These weekly sessions help the ASE Leadership team learn data-informed methods for evaluating outcomes and implementing online teaching practices, including faculty and student online engagement strategies. Recently, the team found itself circling themes when evaluating the student success rates for their online courses: how a lack of student preparedness, or perceived lack of preparedness, affected success rates; how shifts in developmental education may be affecting the ways online instructors support students; and whether these might be online modality issues, or larger trends. Since developmental education was a recurring topic, the team decided to explore the issue more comprehensively.

The ASE Leadership team utilized weekly literature review presentations to research developmental education, challenges, and recent reforms. Reflecting on their own discipline areas, backgrounds and expertise, the contributors of this piece share how the deep dive has informed their online teaching and leadership work, including impacting how they engage with students who

need support entering and persisting in college. The discipline areas represented in this piece include Behavioral Science, Social Sciences, Education and Early Childhood Education, Student Success, Life Sciences, Mathematics, Physical Sciences and Philosophy, English, and Communication. While some see positive shifts following reform, others point out drawbacks as well as the need for additional student support and more online faculty training and development. One finding members of this group agreed upon is that all faculty and administrators are affected directly or indirectly by developmental education reform. Previous shifts in developmental education requirements are still felt across higher education and particularly in online departments where students are increasingly enrolling today.

## 2. Literature Survey

Developmental education is a challenging area for higher education and particularly TYCOAs in the United States. Developmental education is an educational strategy utilized to help students who are perceived as underprepared for the academic rigor of college-level coursework develop critical skills for success (Schak et al., 2017). It includes sub-baccalaureate reading, writing, and math course sequences, often with multiple levels of instruction in each subject area (Schak et al., 2017). During the 2010s, developmental education was subject to large-scale reform by various stakeholders, including external nonprofit organizations, government bodies, institutional research teams, administrators and campus leadership, faculty members, and vocal students themselves. Many voices inside and outside of higher education became change agents and advocates for reform around developmental education.

Developmental education course outcomes are a particular area of concern, especially given that past data indicates that a high number of students were being funneled into developmental education courses based upon varying placement tools. In January 2014, it was reported that 68% of community college students were required to take a developmental education course (Jaggars & Stacey, 2014). But few of the students who enrolled in a developmental education pathway would successfully complete the course and/or be retained by the institution to complete the program-level course in their sequence. A Community College Research Center (CCRC) report from 2014 showed that out of a cohort of 63,650 students assigned to three levels of developmental math, only 11 percent of them successfully completed college algebra (CCRC, 2014). Additionally, research indicates that placement was unreliable: students were regularly over-placed or under-placed into developmental courses (Jaggars & Stacey, 2014).

In response to widespread concerns about developmental education course effects and outcomes, institutions and faculty implemented unique interventions and strategies throughout this reform period. One popular method for English developmental courses was the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP), in which students completed their developmental writing courses as co-requisites with their program-level composition class (Adams et al., 2009). Other methods of developmental education reform included the Emporium model (Twigg, 2011), changes in placement, other co-requisite options, and other provided supports and requirements (Thomas et al., 2016).

Reform strategies for placement often revolved around using multiple measures that might include a student's high school GPA, number of classes taken in the subject, and combining multiple test scores into a more holistic view of the student's understanding and skill level (Thomas et al., 2016). In terms of other support for students, Thomas et al. (2016) recommend requiring or incentivizing advising activities, offering performance-based monetary incentives, and removing other barriers by offering block scheduling, transportation assistance, and textbook assistance. Schak et. al. (2017) notes that "The results show that the largest strides in improving outcomes for developmental students often occur at institutions that make full commitments to reforming multiple aspects of developmental education" (p. 14 ).

The interventions implemented around developmental education were praised for positive shifts in student success rates. Corequisite course structure immediately saw results including improved outcomes. In the "National Report on Developmental Education: Corequisite Reform Is Working," amidst the changing developmental education landscape, TYCOA faculty are encouraged to implement co-requisite course design on their campuses (Sullivan and Adams, 2023). The model resolved the retention issue of students moving between courses because of the structural change. In many cases, co-requisite course structures saw 90% success rates at some institutions and were hailed as a "fundamental redesign" for higher education (Vandal, p. 3, p. 2014).

On the other hand, developmental education reform has been viewed as an equity issue where outcomes are valued above student opportunity and learning. Goudas and Boylan (2012) argue for the contextualization of developmental education success rates given the population and constraints of students who enroll in these courses. They emphasize the value of educational opportunity: "Meeting underprepared students where they are academically affords them the chance to begin their higher education on a firm and equal footing with those who do not need remediation" (Goudas & Boylan, 2012, p. 10). Acceleration is implemented in a way that is inaccessible for some students, leaving developmental education scholars behind in favor of quick fixes.

One area of concern for professionals in the developmental education field lies in the perceptions of developmental education and language used when discussing the field. To many, developmental education is seen in a detrimental light and spoken about using critical language (McGee et al., 2021). In policy, reports, and other media, stakeholders describe developmental education as a problem that holds students back from their ultimate goals: graduation and employment. These stakeholders then make budgetary decisions and determine policy reform goals from this negative viewpoint. Educators in the developmental education field recognize the challenges facing their programs and understand that students in developmental education programs are in need of additional support, time, and resources to be successful. However, they also know of the many successes of developmental education despite the challenges and are committed to equity, including the "acknowledgement or unequal starting points and the provision of varied resources or opportunities in order to produce fair outcomes" (Suh et al., 2021, p. 4). Educators in developmental education may need to take a lead in bringing light to their successes and reshaping the narrative around their program.

Similar to the critical perceptions around developmental education and its resulting reform movement, online learning is a site of lower-than-desired outcomes rates and suspicion from stakeholders. Online course outcomes face similar scrutiny and are often measured by completion and success rates. There is a magnifying glass on online course outcomes as some data indicates that online courses have a negative impact on successfully passing, persisting to the end of the course and the final grade for the course (Xu et al, 2023). Online delivery has been shown to reduce course completion by 13+%, increase withdrawal rates by 9%, and reduce the probability of enrolling and passing program-level courses by 4% (Xu et al., 2023). However, other studies have found that students who take online courses complete degrees faster than students with no online courses (Shea & Bidjerno 2014 as cited in Hachey et al., 2023). Researchers have also found no statistically significant difference between students' grades between online and traditional sections (Gulati et al., 2023). With these conflicting data points and perceptions, stakeholders may see online education, like developmental education, in need of significant reform.

Working and teaching in the primarily online asynchronous department of our institution, we see firsthand the relationship between developmental education and online learning. Student struggles are both muted within online courses and also amplified by the resulting success rates. We observe the way shifts in developmental education have changed the way students show up to their gateway, online courses. However, there is little research on the effect developmental education reform has had on online courses, particularly in TYCOAs. This is a missing piece in the available research as we continue to examine the ripple effects of developmental education reform alongside the rise of the prevalence and delivery of online education in higher education.



**The bigger than life-sized *Thought Bubble* depicted in this image** is an excellent visual, reminding us to think deeply about our work as faculty: our past, our policies, our stories, and our revelations all impact how we support students in realizing their path to success.

Art installation was created on the Ivy Tech Indianapolis campus by Brose Partington, Indianapolis Artist, and friend of Joshua Phillipe, Artist and Professor of Art and art History at Ivy Tech.

### 3. Reflections

#### 3.1 Behavioral Science

*Doug Lalama is IvyOnline's Assistant Faculty Lead for Psychology and an Associate Professor of Psychology. He has been with Ivy Tech since 2008. Eleven years were spent as a full-time faculty member in psychology at the Gary/Lake County campus near Chicago. Throughout Doug's career, he has been active in the development of online classes, having developed six courses for IvyOnline.*

There are competing ideas on how to best handle developmental education. Community colleges are put in a difficult position as open-access institutions because many students do not have the requisite skills to be successful, yet financial constraints make it difficult to help them in a meaningful way. The focus by the institution is to get as many through the system as quickly as possible making those without the skills to keep up vulnerable. Many states have cut the budgets for institutions of higher learning. The current administration is holding back education grants for many educational programs (Lieberman, 2026). With the current political and educational landscape, the ability to offer such programs has been diminished.

The effect is noticeable looking at the long-term perspective. Students seem to me to be not as good at writing as they were when I first started teaching 20 years ago. This could be for other reasons than developmental education practices. I hear from many psychology instructors about the lack of preparation in students taking introductory psychology. They wonder why they are not better prepared. The abilities to read and write are important in introductory psychology success (Altman et al., 2021). While it appears that developmental education might be helpful, there is no significant difference in introductory PSYC outcomes between those who took a developmental English class and those who did not (Altman et al., 2021).

With these statistical results, it becomes difficult to secure financial support for such programs, with limited dollars in the educational institution. The question becomes, how to prepare students for the reading and writing requirements for an introductory PSYC class. At Ivy Tech, English composition is not a prerequisite for PSYC 101. At best, they are taken concurrently. Many psychology instructors, with whom I work are, in essence, teaching writing as part of the psychology curriculum. This goes beyond the expected writing requirements of a psychology instructor where formatting in APA style is part of the curriculum. An additional hurdle in the asynchronous online world is the connection with students. Instructors who see students in the classroom and understand the resources of a specific campus are better able to direct students to the support systems (e.g., writing center, tutoring) than those who are working with students remotely.

#### 3.2 Social Sciences

*Brent Holt is IvyOnline's Assistant Faculty Lead for Social Sciences and joined Ivy Tech in 2011 as Assistant then Associate Professor of Economics at Indianapolis. Brent previously worked in*

*Market Research, Marketing, Sales, and Strategy for companies producing components for engines, transmissions, and industrial applications.*

It is my belief that the need for developmental education continues to be a challenging part of the higher education process for students entering college. However, at times, it is necessary in terms of preparing students for college-level coursework. There have been numerous studies, initiatives, and manipulations of the different aspects of the developmental education process. Yet, the continuing challenges and end results of different developmental education programs do not seem to have made a significant difference in the number of students determined to be needing developmental education or improving overall success rates for those students. Moreover, this lack of significant progress indicates that there has been a lack of consistency in policy or application of these programs that further contributes to the inconsistency of results in terms of increasing student success.

From a Social Sciences perspective, the largest need for developmental education seems to be a lack of student preparation for college-level writing. Anecdotally, the instructors across the online Social Sciences courses that I supervise with IvyOnline are fairly consistent in reporting that their students are underprepared. Math preparation or competence is not as much of an issue in Social Sciences with the possible exception of Economics.

A substantial portion of the instructors with whom I work provide resources in their courses to guide and assist their students with college-level writing. These include instructions and resources for proper citations and encouragement in writing style. Several instructors also provide references and direction to writing and academic resources such as Purdue's OWL (Online Writing Lab), a comprehensive research and writing reference guide. Additionally, direction and instruction for research and citation in particular are considerations during the course development process in several Social Sciences online courses.

### **3.3 Education and Early Childhood Education**

*Dr. Amanda Purcell is an Associate Professor and Program Chair of Education at the Lawrenceburg campus and serves as the Assistant Faculty Lead for early childhood and elementary education for IvyOnline. Before joining Ivy Tech in 2017, Amanda spent 13 years teaching high school and dual credit English.*

I used to assume that if students made it into my education courses, any gaps from math or English had already been addressed. Over time, however, I have realized how untrue that assumption is. I also tended to view developmental education as something that happened (or was supposed to happen) "before" my work with students, rather than the lack of having benefited from it continued to affect their experiences in my classes and beyond.

As an education faculty member, I do not have direct experience with developmental education courses; however, I have seen how success in gateway courses impacts student success in other

courses. This is particularly true in education where students will be expected to take the knowledge and skills they have learned in math and English courses and apply those in their future classrooms. When I see education students struggling late in the course or dropping out, it is often not due to a lack of effort, but rather a gap in skills and knowledge that was never fully addressed before my courses. If students begin their education program with a deficit, it tends to compound over time, eventually affecting their degree completion, chances of testing into their four-year teaching programs, and passing required licensing exams.

The cost of developmental education (both time and money) is also a factor that affects students and institutions. The cost of developmental education has been estimated at nearly seven billion dollars per year in the US, yet many students do not advance beyond remediation (Jaggers & Stacey, 2014). This is a significant cost, especially when so few students actually benefit from these efforts. Given time and finances, it is fairly clear why most institutions have moved toward course acceleration and co-requisite models that try to fast-track students into credit-bearing courses. While evidence suggests that these approaches can improve persistence and lead students to credit-bearing coursework, the results are uneven and difficult to replicate across institutions (Jaggers et al., 2014). For me, it seems like a balancing act. We are trying to do what is right for students while also navigating the practical, financial, and policy pressures TYCOAs face. In the end, we have to consider if what we are doing helps move students forward or unintentionally creates more obstacles for them.

Student placement is also a key component of developmental education, and this is an area where my perspective has shifted. Most colleges still heavily rely on standardized placement test results that often misplace students in courses (Jaggers & Stacey, 2014). I have seen students placed into courses that were far below their actual skill level and others who ended up in courses they just weren't ready for. Either way, it sets them up for frustration. Some end up spending time and money on classes they don't really need, while others get overwhelmed and get behind or just quit. Jaggers and Stacey (2014) pointed out how these mismatches contribute to low completion and success rates, which aligns with what I see anecdotally in my program and collegewide.

In my own courses, especially online courses, I have been more intentional in implementing strategies such as scaffolding resources for students who may have these skill gaps and providing substantive feedback on assignments with the opportunity to revise. Because I have seen how misplacement and skill gaps show up in my courses, I try to support students where they are while also advocating for more accurate placement practices. We owe it to our students to place them where they actually have a chance to thrive and succeed and to design our courses so that supports are embedded into the content and learning management system (LMS). Appropriate course placement, especially in developmental education courses, is one way we can reduce barriers for students, help them stay on track, and successfully complete their programs.

### 3.4 Student Success

*Jacquelyn Clapper-Erpelding is the IvyOnline Assistant Faculty Lead for Student Success. Before stepping into her current role, Jacquelyn served as a Senior Academic Advisor at the Fort Wayne campus for 12 years and taught developmental math and IVYTIXX courses.*

As an academic advisor, I saw developmental education courses as a way to help students strengthen the foundational skills they needed for college-level coursework. I found co-requisite courses especially helpful because they allowed students to receive support while enrolled in college-level classes. I also worked with students who used the free, self-paced assessment to place directly into college-level courses. This allowed them to move forward more quickly and avoid the extra time and cost of developmental education courses.

No matter what path students took, I encouraged them to use the free resources available at Ivy Tech, such as online and in-person tutoring, writing and math labs, and wraparound services. Over time, I saw how important it was to offer multiple pathways to success. Some students thrived with self-paced assessments, while others benefited more from co-requisite courses, tutoring, or academic coaching.

With my strong foundation as an academic advisor and now as a new full-time student success instructor, I have developed a deeper understanding of how college systems can either support or hold students back. One resource that strongly shaped my thinking was *The Five Principles of Reforming Development Education* (Bickerstaff et al., 2022). It focuses on co-requisite models, multiple placement measures, and both academic and personal support to help students succeed.

Now, in my online classroom, I often find myself right there with students, “fighting their fight,” offering encouragement, consistent support, and persistence when things start to feel overwhelming or complicated. I focus on giving students practical tools and strategies they can readily use, while also helping them build stronger academic habits over time. It is not always a smooth process, but with consistent support, students begin to build confidence, strengthen their skills, and stay engaged in their progress.

### 3.5 Life Sciences

*Angela Sparkman is a Professor and IvyOnline Assistant Faculty Lead for Life Sciences. Angela joined Ivy Tech in 2007 as the chair of the Medical Laboratory Technology program at the Sellersburg campus. During her time at the college, Angela has taught courses in health sciences, life sciences, IVYT (student success), and the general studies capstone course. Angela has been active in the development of online courses, having developed 5 courses for IvyOnline and leads IvyOnline’s professional development program.*

I came into this work thinking I knew a lot about developmental education and had strong preconceived ideas. I believed developmental education was warranted for students who tested into it and was always valuable. I have been a faculty member at our community college for 18

years—long enough to see many changes in our developmental education structure, and the ways in which those changes have influenced the courses I teach (health and life sciences, and IVYT/student orientation). I came into our research expecting to read how beneficial it was for students. Instead, I learned that the topic of developmental education is not clear cut, and research shows a variety of viewpoints and evidence. While it may be particularly helpful for some students, it can delay or even prevent completion for others (Bickerstaff et al., 2022).

I noticed some major changes as the medical laboratory technology (MEDL) program chair when our college first made changes to developmental education and testing procedures. Laboratory science is highly dependent upon strong (but fairly low level) math skills for basic statistical calculations, unit conversions, and basic algebra. It is also highly dependent upon strong problem-solving skills. The changes to developmental math brought me more students who were not college-ready and struggled to succeed.

I spend more time reviewing introductory level skills than I did in the past and working individually with students on avoiding plagiarism and developing scientific reading, writing, and math skills. I have often taken the approach of assuming that my students may be lacking in these skills, so I provide as much focused help and support as possible to help my students succeed.

I think developmental education can be most effective for helping students develop self-efficacy and a certain confidence as a college student. I remember one particular student from teaching IVYT/student orientation. The student was in his forties and overwhelmed with the college experience. What is a registrar? What is a bursar? What do you mean I have to use this computer program for my course even though I'm an in-person student? We talked during class and met week after week to discuss the "hidden rules" of college and how to be successful. He succeeded in the course and went on his way. I didn't hear from him again until I saw him right before graduation. He stopped by my office to tell me he was graduating and thanked me for the help that I gave him early on, explaining that it provided the foundation and care he needed to make it to graduation. Students often lean on instructors for support, belonging, and to help them understand these hidden rules of higher education (Koutsouris et al., 2021).

With the changes to our developmental education pathways, critical thinking skills seemed most impacted in my courses. I wish that I knew the reason for this. I hypothesize that students who previously took developmental education courses had more practice with needed skills, and that practice gave them confidence. Confidence often gives people the strength needed to examine topics from a different perspective, leading to better critical thinking. High self-efficacy helps students overcome challenges and meet goals; unfortunately, many new community college students do not have high self-efficacy. Developmental education can be a key part of the process of building strong self-efficacy (Tinto, 2015). I believe that because students are no longer gaining confidence in needed skills from developmental education courses, they may be lacking self-efficacy in situations where confidence is needed for problem solving.

Developing self-efficacy has been a major strategy that I have used in the development and supervision of online anatomy and physiology courses. The courses are carefully organized and scaffolded to gradually build confidence in both online learning and course content. Additional care is taken to provide guidance on APA format and setting up a weekly schedule to build time management skills. Critical thinking skills are gradually developed through the two anatomy and physiology sequenced courses.

While I thought I knew a lot about developmental education (and believed that many of our students would be more successful with remediation), I have come to learn that might not always be the best approach. My thoughts are more jumbled than ever. After each literature review that our team has presented, I feel increasingly confused and believe we have to do something to help these students...but what?

It seems to be widely accepted that many students are not “college ready”, lacking the math, reading, writing, or technology skills needed to succeed in college. I still firmly believe that these students need additional help and guidance to be successful; but providing that guidance in the form of developmental education courses may not be the right path. Having to take multiple courses that “don’t count toward my degree,” as I have heard many students say, can be discouraging and demotivating. So, what is the right answer? It seems nobody knows, and it may be different for each student. The best strategy seems to be an individualized approach for each student. While that may not be possible institution-wide, it is my goal to provide that individualized attention to every online student I can.

### 3.6 Mathematics

*Debbie Youse is an Associate Professor and Assistant Faculty Lead for Math. Debbie started at Ivy Tech in 2008 at the Fort Wayne campus and transitioned to IvyOnline full-time in 2024 after serving part-time since 2021. Debbie is known for her attention to detail and enjoys teaching math and experimenting with technology.*

I think developmental education has been and always will be a topic of discussion for both students and faculty. There is a balance that needs to occur between supporting the students but also keeping college affordable. For students who need developmental education in their math foundation, there should be pathways to help them succeed, while avoiding increased costs through repeated failures or dropping out.

Specifically in math, there will always be discussion about developmental education, and I expect there will always be changes related to that, for good or bad. When Ivy Tech had changes in our developmental education classes in the past, we saw a decrease in preparedness in the students entering program-level courses. Program-level faculty could almost pinpoint the students who entered coming from developmental education courses versus placement assessment tests. But then our institution also had a shift in the kind of assessment test, or Knowledge Assessment, to get into the courses, so that seemed to affect the skill level of our students coming into the program-

level courses. Ivy Tech had new iterations of math courses at the developmental education level every couple of years, as the College tried new things. Changes included the number of courses, the contact and credit hours, as well as the teaching models. My campus implemented the Emporium model (Twigg, 2011). The underlying principle is simple: Students learn math by doing math, not by listening to someone talk about doing math. Interactive computer software, personalized on-demand assistance, and mandatory student participation are the key elements of success.

It took an incredible amount of time and work by faculty in the department to move to this model. With the Emporium model, many students found success in developmental education; however, this impacted student expectations when entering the program-level courses. Because students thought all courses would use that same Emporium model, many students failed program-level courses being taught in a more traditional style. It was hard for the students to transition and meet the expectations in the program-level courses.

At TYCOAs like Ivy Tech Community College, there should be supports in place to meet those students where they are, but everyone needs to be on board with that, from faculty and students to administrators and financial teams. Maybe that means having dedicated developmental education courses, or maybe that means having those skills integrated into the curriculum for the program-level courses. That's the tricky part. But I agree with one of the first recommendations from educational stakeholders discussing reform. Help students avoid or minimize time spent in developmental education, but do not eliminate it for students who need it (Schak et al., 2017).

In our online math courses, each course starts with an introduction discussion, which includes questions that ask students to share a bit about their math background or how they feel about math. From those responses, faculty can reach out to individual students who identify as students who could struggle or may be a bit underprepared. In some cases, these first conversations have helped students realize that they want to drop the existing course and enroll in a lower, often development education level, course to find success and build up their skills.

One-way online math faculty are meeting students where they are by assisting them with using the technology required for our third-party assignment platforms. This includes items like how you use an online graph or how you enter mathematical notation for answers. Some faculty will record short videos with a demo of using specific items for assignments. We also know the importance of providing grading feedback to help identify where a student may have a knowledge gap or what content we can recommend that the student study. Maybe we help point out the student to review material in their e-text that isn't part of the course objectives but is something they can reference to help fill that gap and get up to pace with the skills needed to move forward in the course. Faculty also can make direct recommendations for using the free online tutoring services that we have linked in every course menu. Many faculty will meet with students via Zoom to answer student questions in live time, but all online faculty spend a large portion of their time answering individual student questions that each student can send to the instructor directly from their third-party assignment. This includes a direct link to that student's problem, any answers they entered, and a

brief explanation from the student as to where they are stuck. Having that individual support is what a student can often get through their online math course.

### 3.7 Physical Sciences and Philosophy

*Dr. Carmin Burrell is the IvyOnline Assistant Faculty Lead for Physical Sciences and Associate Professor of Chemistry. Carmin has been with the College since 2016. Carmin began her career at the Columbus campus where she served as Department Chair for 3 years before moving to IvyOnline part-time in 2020 and full-time in 2021. Carmin has a passion for online physical science education and sees it as an opportunity for our students.*

In full transparency, I saw developmental education as an ineffective program that was intended to help students learn foundational skills, but in practice, it kept students back from reaching their educational goals. I only ever heard the stories of students not gaining the skills and knowledge necessary to move forward in their educational pursuits. I also did not take the time to learn more about developmental education, because it did not seem to influence teaching my chemistry (CHEM) courses. I often wished that students had stronger mathematics (MATH) skills coming into CHEM, but I didn't see developmental MATH as an effective way for students to gain those skills. However, our exploration into developmental education has certainly helped me understand the scope and potential benefits of developmental education programming.

When reading the first few pages of *Materiality and Writing Studies* (Hassel & Phillips, 2022), I made a few notes related to our work. On page 1, there was a faculty account, in which they shared: "[...]The rest of the students, however, are far, far short of that length, and several students cannot access their accounts, usually because of financial or clerical issues [...]." This made me wonder about many of the students that end up in our late enrollment and reinstatement processes. How many late enrollment requests indicate issues with accounts and how many non-payment reinstatements do we process each year? How many of those students might have benefited from some level of developmental education (wraparound services) to help them better understand the "hidden language of higher ed."

When reading *Materiality and Writing Studies*, I also thought about privilege, and how faculty privilege is a crucial component of the success and effectiveness of developmental education. When we hear faculty pushing back on work in the developmental education space, they are pulling from their own experiences. We hear a lot of "Well, when I was a student, I didn't do this... and students today are failing because they are doing that" or "I did this, my priorities were... and students these days need to do that or get their priorities straight". "You can't be a full-time student, work, and have a family. They need to pick something." Faculty don't seem to understand their own privilege in those types of statements.

I have learned that wraparound services, cohorting students, and providing social developmental support and helping students develop a better understanding of how higher education works can also fall under developmental education. It is not all about academic skills. The personal and life

skills are also important for student success and students may need additional support with those, too. In the classroom, I think developmental education changes have likely affected my faculty, but in ways that are not obvious. After our research, I feel that my faculty should have a role in developmental education within our CHEM courses.

In CHEM, a frequent comment I hear is “I shouldn’t have to do math review for them to be successful. That’s what pre-reqs are for. Students need to review on their own time.” Seeming to miss that students are not going to remember 100% of past classes, students don’t have the roadmap for CHEM when taking MATH, so don’t know how math will be applicable, and that our TYCOA students likely have more challenges than we did when we were a higher ed student. They don’t seem to give credibility or understanding to other perspectives or journeys. They don’t seem to value the statement from page 2: “This journey for them is longer, has more obstacles, and is full of uncertainty” (Hassel & Phillips, 2022).

Rather than being upset that we might have to help students refresh or learn prerequisite MATH skills, we should be considering ways to provide structure and support for those MATH skills that are necessary for success in our classes. It isn’t necessarily our job to reteach MATH courses, but it is our responsibility to help students with skills necessary to our classes.

### 3.8 English

*Joe Betz is a Professor of English and IvyOnline Assistant Faculty Lead for English courses. Joe started as a full-time faculty member at the Bloomington campus in 2013. In 2021, he became the part-time AFL for English and in 2023 transitioned to his full-time AFL role with IvyOnline. Joe is passionate about faculty mentorship and provides leadership for IvyOnline’s biggest area with more than 150 faculty and more than 13,000 student seats annually.*

College writers must work to understand, synthesize, and apply ideas from texts of varied difficulty to inform their own writing. It’s tough. It’s especially difficult if the student needs reading and writing support, something they may not be able to access at all given current TYCOA curricula, and that difficulty is compounded by an accelerated course modality punctuated by moments of intensive work (submitting final drafts of major essays). How can we support our developmental education students in this environment?

Ivy Tech has followed many strategies described by the U.S. Department of Education to better place and support developmental education students, such as multiple assessment measures to more accurately identify developmental education students and use corequisite degree pathways that have the student take the developmental writing course alongside the program-level course (Schak et al., 2017). The focus on reducing time in developmental education, or eliminating it, has been a consistent focus for Ivy Tech for many years.

While accurate placement for developmental education students is critical, I am most concerned with the general acceleration across all aspects of the student experience and the lack of tangible support offered for our TYCOA students. In Schnee’s (2022) “Speaking Back to The Neoliberal

Community College,” we discover that student pressure around financial concerns affects them greatly, which is no surprise, and that helping students reduce the cost burden of college makes a noticeable, positive difference. If financial pressure is combined with a skills deficit, how difficult must it be for that online student to succeed, who may be taking their course online due to work conflicts? What can we do to help support these online students?

The answers will evolve, but I want to offer one here for us for our accelerated online courses that may include developmental education students: We must understand our courses and the pressure point in the semester where students struggle most. For example, reviewing recent online ENGL 111 assignment level data, students struggled to submit the final draft of their second major essay more than any other major essay assignment. Therefore, we can focus on this part of the term and seek, as faculty, to build more effective scaffolds; connect directly with struggling students; offer synchronous, recorded sessions breaking down sample essays IN summary, we can be more proactive because we know this is a key point when students struggle most.

### 3.9 Communication

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Conducting such a deep dive into the research of developmental education and reform, I am faced with several misconceptions and assumptions. One noted misconception is the type of academic support students continue to need throughout their academic career. While we do not work directly with developmental education courses as communication faculty, we occasionally find that students need extra support with writing when they are preparing speech outlines and reflection papers. Some of these same students also struggle to conduct, analyze, and properly cite academic research. Many students who take Introduction to Interpersonal Communication and Fundamentals of Public Speaking struggle to organize their thoughts and stumble through oral presentations due to their lack of preparation and lack of confidence. These challenges have been apparent over time but are not always connected to the complex conversation of developmental education.

Despite my unintentional blind eye to the discourse on developmental education, I am critically aware that students also experience frustrations for reasons other than academics. They sift through strict requirements while navigating outside life stressors that cause them to fall behind or lose focus. These obstacles often impact how they enter college and how they are able to persevere, which may ultimately spill over into how their lives shape up socially.

To address these concerns, some online communication faculty provide reasonable support by posting tutoring resources and supplemental videos. Others go above and beyond by spending countless hours offering substantive feedback on student assignment submissions and meeting with students one-on-one to help them succeed. Some other faculty express growing frustrations

with underprepared students and the demand on them, as faculty, to produce successful outcomes with limited resources and time.

When I reflect on developmental education through another lens, a personal, more familiar lens, I am reminded of what it is like to be a student. As a first-generation college student, I remember having to overcome obstacles both academically, psychologically, and socially. My very best friend encouraged me to choose community college over a university, mainly because she was following in the footsteps of her own older siblings. For me, it was a successful experience. I nearly graduated with honors (for free) and was able to transfer to a university with enough scholarship money to begin taking classes within my major during my junior year. I was on schedule to graduate with a bachelor's degree within 18 months and did just that.

My friend's experience should have been the same seeing as though we had the same major and same career aspirations. Instead, she struggled to pass the developmental courses required before she could enroll in the required college algebra course. She took a math course every semester of her college journey. I watched her study, do extra work, get tutoring, lose hope, fail, cry, and repeat until she finally earned her degree several semesters later.

In my online communication courses, I remember my friend's experiences, and I have resolved that all students need support for learning. And while support may look different for every student, I think it is important to explore, "how are we supporting learners" no matter where they are on their journey? For this to happen, I consider relational approaches such as showing interest in how students learn and highlighting when students have positive experiences with the course content, their classmates, or with their instructor. Measuring the outcome of this approach relies on continuous improvement and a sustained commitment to inspire students at every juncture of this journey.

#### 4. Conclusion

As a team, we explored recent changes and reform movements within the field of developmental education in the United States. We were surprised by what we knew and what we did not know about shifts in developmental education—even those that took place at our own institution. Because of our inquiry and reflection, we better understand the ways that shifts in skill development and preparatory requirements have affected our online teaching work—including course delivery, faculty engagement, instructional practices, and course outcomes. We have also come to realize that developmental education is still a tremendous challenge for institutions, especially TYCOAs like ours that offer high numbers of online courses. One of our primary takeaways is that everyone in higher education, especially those teaching and working at TYCOAs like ours, has been affected by changes and updates to developmental education. This is because developmental education (and the removal of developmental education requirements) directly affects the way students show up to their gateway classes. Some of us on this team, like Debbie (Math) and Joe (English), were directly connected to developmental math and writing students, and were involved in some of the institutional changes. Yet, the deficits we see in students' math and writing skills are discussed in

many of the reflections from across several disciplines. For instance, Brent (Social Sciences) reflects on the reports from Social Science instructors who state that students are underprepared for the demands of college level writing assignments.

Others on the team, such as Amanda (Education) and Carmin (Physical Sciences), were impacted indirectly by the developmental education reform movement. For example, Carmin reflects on not seeing the connection at first. Students may be struggling in her online physical science classes, but she recognizes, “it’s not all about academic skills” and other services such as “wraparound services, cohorting students, and providing social developmental support.... can also fall under developmental education.” Amanda describes her experience with developmental education courses as indirect but sees the long-term effects on online students. We notice that even if faculty and academic leadership (such as Chairs and Deans) don’t know that they are touched by developmental education and its historical reforms; they are.

The large-scale removal of developmental education course requirements and shifting placement measures has not simply erased the need for academic preparatory work. Instead, we see this need show up elsewhere, requiring compromises between student placement, student success, and institutional funding. These areas constrain each other as institutions decide how to manage and prioritize their resources—and online learning adds another layer of complexity. As Doug(psychology) reflects on the topic, he describes the changes he has personally witnessed in his online students’ academic preparedness and the financial constraints associated with supporting student learning. Several of the authors in this piece grappled with the need to teach student skills that they should already know. As Angela (Life Sciences) reflects on her online teaching work, she realizes, “I spend more time reviewing introductory level skills than I did in the past.” Similarly, Carmin shares in her reflection the sentiments of online faculty who don’t believe they are responsible for supporting students with developmental education, recognizing the faculty privilege when it comes to critiquing students for their lack of preparedness. These are real frustrations as online faculty, who might not have a lot of training in educational skill-building and educational theory and pedagogy, struggle to meet online students’ needs and help create the conditions for student success.

Others embrace the challenge of meeting students where they are and addressing the variety of skills they bring to the classroom. Jacquelyn (Student Success) describes the way her Academic Advisor experience guides her to help online students with their life skills as they approach college. Similarly, Angela shares an anecdote of how she spends her time in and out of the classroom translating the hidden language and rules of college—things that first-generation students struggle to understand about college during their first semester. By working directly with online students, we recognize the importance of equipping them with resources like online tutoring and access to campus-based services that will help students excel academically and persist.

Reflecting on the way our TYCOA and many other institutions removed developmental education courses and adjusted placement measures specifically to reduce the number of students placed into developmental education, we are better able to identify the impact in our online classrooms. We

understand that online learning is often blamed for many issues facing higher education—and share concerns (and see firsthand) that students who might have benefited from developmental education face additional hurdles when placed into our text-dense, asynchronous online learning environments. And yet, we also see that course modality is just one complication to a dynamic and shifting higher education landscape. Exploring our own developmental education reform context has helped this team as faculty administrators to better understand and serve our diverse student populations who show up ready to learn in our online courses.

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