AVC Basic Skills – Effective Practices/Strategies for Action Plan
Reference for Basic Skills Activity and Funding Proposals
From the California Basic Skills Poppy Copy

"Basic skills" are those foundational skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and ESL, as well as learning skills and study skills, which are necessary for students to succeed in college level work.

"Effective practices" refer to organizational, administrative, instructional, or support activities engaged in by highly successful programs, as validated by research and literature sources relating to developmental education.

Over 250 references, spanning more than thirty years, were reviewed, making this the most comprehensive review of literature in the area of basic skills conducted in California community colleges to date. Study after study by a multitude of researchers confirms a consistent set of elements that commonly characterize effective developmental education programs.

These elements can be organized under the broad categories of organizational and administrative practices, program components, staff development, and instructional practices. A total of twenty-six effective practices emerged under these four major categories and are listed below.

Organizational & Administrative Practices

Institutional choices concerning program structure, organization, and management have been related to the overall effectiveness of developmental education programs. The following effective practices have been identified in this area:

A.1   Developmental education is a clearly stated institutional priority.
A.2   A clearly articulated mission based on a shared, overarching philosophy drives the developmental education program.
A.3   The developmental education program is centralized or highly coordinated.
A.4   Institutional policies facilitate student completion of necessary developmental coursework as early as possible in the educational sequence.
A.5   A comprehensive system of support services exists, and is characterized by a high degree of integration among academic and student support services.
A.6   Faculty who are both knowledgeable and enthusiastic about developmental education are recruited and hired to teach in the program.
A.7   Institutions manage faculty and student expectations regarding developmental education.

Program Components

According to the literature, a number of specific programmatic components are characteristic of highly effective developmental education programs. These include:

B.1   Orientation, assessment, and placement are mandatory for all new students.
B.2   Regular program evaluations are conducted, results are disseminated widely, and data are used to improve practice.
B.3   Counseling support provided is substantial, accessible, and integrated with academic courses/programs.
B.4   Financial aid is disseminated to support developmental students. Mechanisms exist to ensure that developmental students are aware of such opportunities and are provided with assistance to apply for and acquire financial aid

Staff Development

According to the literature, the importance of comprehensive training and development opportunities for faculty and staff who work with developmental students cannot be overestimated.

Programs with a strong professional development component have been shown to yield better student retention rates and better student performance in developmental courses than those without such an emphasis (Boylan, Bonham, Claxton, and Bliss, 1992). Furthermore, analysis has demonstrated that specific training is one of the leading variables contributing to the success of a variety of components of developmental education, including tutoring, advising, and instruction. Boylan goes so far as to state that, "no matter what component of developmental education was being studied, an emphasis on training and professional development improved its outcomes" (Boylan, 2002, 46). Effective practices include:

C.1   Administrators support and encourage faculty development in basic skills, and the improvement of teaching and learning is connected to the institutional mission.
C.2   The faculty play a primary role in needs assessment, planning, and implementation of staff development programs and activities in support of basic skills programs.
C.3   Staff development programs are structured and appropriately supported to sustain them as ongoing efforts related to institutional goals for the improvement of teaching and learning.
C.4   Staff development opportunities are flexible, varied, and responsive to developmental needs of individual faculty, diverse student populations, and coordinated programs/ services.
C.5   Faculty development is clearly connected to intrinsic and extrinsic faculty reward structures.

Instructional Practices
Effective instructional practices are the key to achieving desired student outcomes for developmental programs. Research has linked the following instructional practices with success for developmental learners:

D.1   Sound principles of learning theory are applied in the design and delivery of courses in the developmental program.
D.2   Curricula and practices that have proven to be effective within specific disciplines are employed.
D.3   The developmental education program addresses holistic development of all aspects of the student. Attention is paid to the social and emotional development of the students as well as to their cognitive growth.
D.4   Culturally Responsive Teaching theory and practices are applied to all aspects of the developmental instructional programs and services.
D.5   A high degree of structure is provided in developmental education courses.
D.6   Developmental education faculty employ a variety of instructional methods to accommodate student diversity.
D.7   Programs align entry/exit skills among levels and link course content to college level performance requirements.
D.8   Developmental education faculty routinely share instructional strategies.
D.9   Faculty and advisors closely monitor student performance
D.10   Programs provide comprehensive academic support mechanisms, including the use of trained tutors.

Important Note:
For more information, please review the AVC Basic Skills Self-Assessment for Effective Practices. You can find the complete AVC self-assessment documents at
MyAVC Basic Skills Committee Group web page under *Files* and *Self-Assessment*.

If you need help to locate the documents, please contact:
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