



## Students who take postsecondary remedial or developmental courses are significantly less likely to complete their credential or degree.

### Background on Postsecondary Remedial or Developmental Education

Most students believe that when they graduate from high school, they should be prepared for postsecondary work in our community colleges or universities. However, too many students soon discover that their high school diploma does not guarantee that they are college-ready. Students who are underprepared often must take one or more remedial or developmental courses in English, reading, or math. According to the NC Community College System (NCCCS), in the fall of 2009, nearly two-thirds (61 percent) of first-time, credential-seeking NCCCS students were enrolled in at least one developmental course in English, reading, or math, and 33 percent were enrolled in two or more developmental courses. Based on data from the University of North Carolina, nearly one in ten (9.5 percent) first-year students who began at a UNC institution in the fall of 2008 took at least one remedial course in their first semester.

Remedial or developmental courses are often the first barrier students face on their path to completing a postsecondary degree or credential. The courses are costly to students, postsecondary institutions, and the state; are focused on knowledge and skills students should have learned in high school; and often do not provide credit towards a student's credential or degree. **In addition, research from the National Center on Education Statistics shows that students pursuing a certificate, associate's, or bachelor's degree who took remedial or developmental courses were significantly less likely to complete their credential or degree than students who did not need remedial courses.**

- Students who were enrolled in a remedial reading course were only half as likely to complete their degree or certificate as students who did not have to take any remedial courses (30 percent compared to 69 percent).
- Students who were enrolled in one or two remedial math courses were one-third less likely to complete their degree or certificate as students who did not have to take any remedial courses (42 percent compared to 69 percent).

### Addressing the Remedial or Developmental Education Challenge

On April 13, the Hunt Institute, in partnership with the UNC-Chapel Hill Program on Public Life, hosted a dinner discussion focused on what state policymakers can do to improve student success in remedial or developmental education. As was discussed during the dinner, **there will always be a need for remedial or developmental education**, especially at community colleges given the amount of adult basic education and worker re-training the system provides (the average age of all community college students in North Carolina is 34). Regardless of age or time of entry into postsecondary programs, postsecondary institutions and state policymakers must work to ensure that students have effective supports to succeed in remedial or developmental courses and continue on to complete a credential or degree.

The discussion focused on two main areas for improving remedial or developmental education.

- **Aligning high school graduation standards and college entrance expectations** – Currently, significant differences exist between the content high schools teach and the expectations postsecondary institutions have for incoming students. North Carolina's adoption of the Common Core State Standards provides a perfect opportunity for the state's K-12, community college, and university systems to come to consensus around the academic expectations for both high school graduation and postsecondary enrollment.
- **Restructuring assessment and course placement to better meet students' skill deficits** – When students fail a college placement exam, they often have to sit through an entire remedial or developmental course even if they just need to strengthen their knowledge and skills in one or two particular areas. The NCCCS has been working to restructure placement assessments so that students can then receive targeted support through tutorials or course modules rather than having to take a semester or year-long course which might cover material in which they are already proficient.

For more information on this topic, see the Hunt Institute's February 2011 issue of [coNCEPTS](#).