

# BASIC WRITING STUDENT PROGRESS AND COURSE-TAKING PATTERNS

OFFICE OF PLANNING, RESEARCH AND INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS  
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## BACKGROUND

Increasing numbers of students entering colleges and universities require remediation in reading, composition or mathematics, and this trend is particularly prominent at community colleges. Recent studies estimate that over half of all community college students enroll in a remedial course at some point in the college careers (Attewell, Lavin, Domina & Levey, 2006), and this figure is likely an underestimate of the actual need for developmental programs.

With such a high percentage of students needing additional preparation for college-level coursework, more attention is being focused on the outcomes of developmental programs. The body of research on developmental education has been inconclusive at best, and some studies have even shown unfavorable results of developmental programs. The most recent Accountability Reporting for the California Community Colleges (ARCC) report (CCCCO System Office, 2009) showed that although 60% of students complete their basic skills courses statewide, just 51% of successful basic skills students complete a higher-level course within three years. At Delta College, the figure is even lower: just 42% of basic skills completers subsequently enroll in and complete a higher-level course (CCCCO System Office, 2009).

Research conducted by the Office of Planning, Research and Institutional Effectiveness shows that up to 85% of students enrolled at the College place at pre-college levels in reading, writing or math. With this in mind, it is essential to assess developmental course outcomes and developmental student progression to higher-level courses. Delta College students who assessed at Level 1 in composition are placed into English 70 (Basic Writing Skills) and are expected to progress to English 79 (Preparatory English) and then to English 1A (Written Communications), the transfer-level English course.

A study was conducted to identify the proportion of students that begin in the Level 1 English course (English 70) and progress to the transfer-level English course, English 1A. The goals of the study were to (1) examine student course-taking patterns in the developmental English pathway, and (2) determine the proportion of students on the pathway that ultimately complete English 1A.

## METHODOLOGY

Student course-taking and completion data were obtained from the College's System 2000 database for students who enrolled in Basic Writing Skills (English 70) between summer 2003 and spring 2008. Course enrollment, FTES and instructional cost data were obtained from the College's faculty load reports and financial database system. Pathway costs were calculated for both a "model student" and an "average student." A description of each is provided below.

### Cost Calculation: Model Student

The "Model Student" figures provide costs per course for each pathway assuming each student passes the course on his or her first attempt. Cost per enrollment figures were calculated by summing the costs of instruction in 2007-2008 and dividing them by total annual course enrollment. Cost per FTES was calculated by summing the cost of instruction for English 70 in 2007-2008 and dividing it by the annual FTES for all sections of English 70. Instructional costs were also calculated for English 79 and English 1A to obtain a total cost estimate for the developmental English pathway.

### Cost Calculation: Average Student

The "Average Student" calculation is similar to the "Model Student" calculation but also factors in the number of attempts required for an average student to pass a course. The same calculation employed for the Model Student

cost estimates was used for the Average Student cost estimates, however, average attempts required to succeed in each course was added as a multiplier for each course's cost per enrollment and cost per FTES figures.

## RESULTS

A total of 5,779 students enrolled in English 70 between summer 2003 and spring 2008. Of these students, 68% eventually passed the course in an average of just over one (1.09) attempts. Over two in three (69%) of the students who passed went on to enroll in English 79. The first-attempt pass rate for these students was just 51%. Nearly two in three of these students (65%) went on to pass English 79 in an average of 1.26 attempts. Of those, just over half (55%) went on to enroll in English 1A, and 70% passed on their first attempt. A full 78% of the students who enrolled in English 1A eventually passed the course in an average of 1.13 attempts. When the total number of English 70 students is taken into account, just 13% passed English 1A.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the course progression and cost analysis are provided in Figure 1 in the form of a student progression/flow chart for the developmental English pathway to transfer-level English (English 1A). The chart illustrates completion rates and average number of repeats for English 70 students. As the figure shows, fewer and fewer students funnel through the pathway at each progressive step, and just 13% of all English 70 students complete English 1A.

The cost for the average student to complete this entire pathway was just under \$1,000 per enrollment and just under \$5,600 per FTES. The model student course cost was similar across all three English courses (English 70, English 79 and English 1A), between \$1,500 and \$1,700 per FTES and between \$260 and \$280 per enrollment. It is notable that the majority of those who reach the first benchmark along the pathway (completion of English 70) go on to enroll in the next course, English 79. However, these students have a relatively low first attempt pass rate in English 79: only about half pass on their first try. This finding reveals a need to reexamine the linking of curricula between English 70 and 79. Additional studies should be conducted to identify the factors contributing to this break in the pathway. It appears that once students reach the English 79 benchmark, those that attempt English 1A have a 70% chance of passing on their first try and a 78% chance of completing the course. These figures are encouraging and show that if the break between English 70 and English 79 can be improved, higher numbers of students are likely to enroll and succeed in English 1A.

## REFERENCES

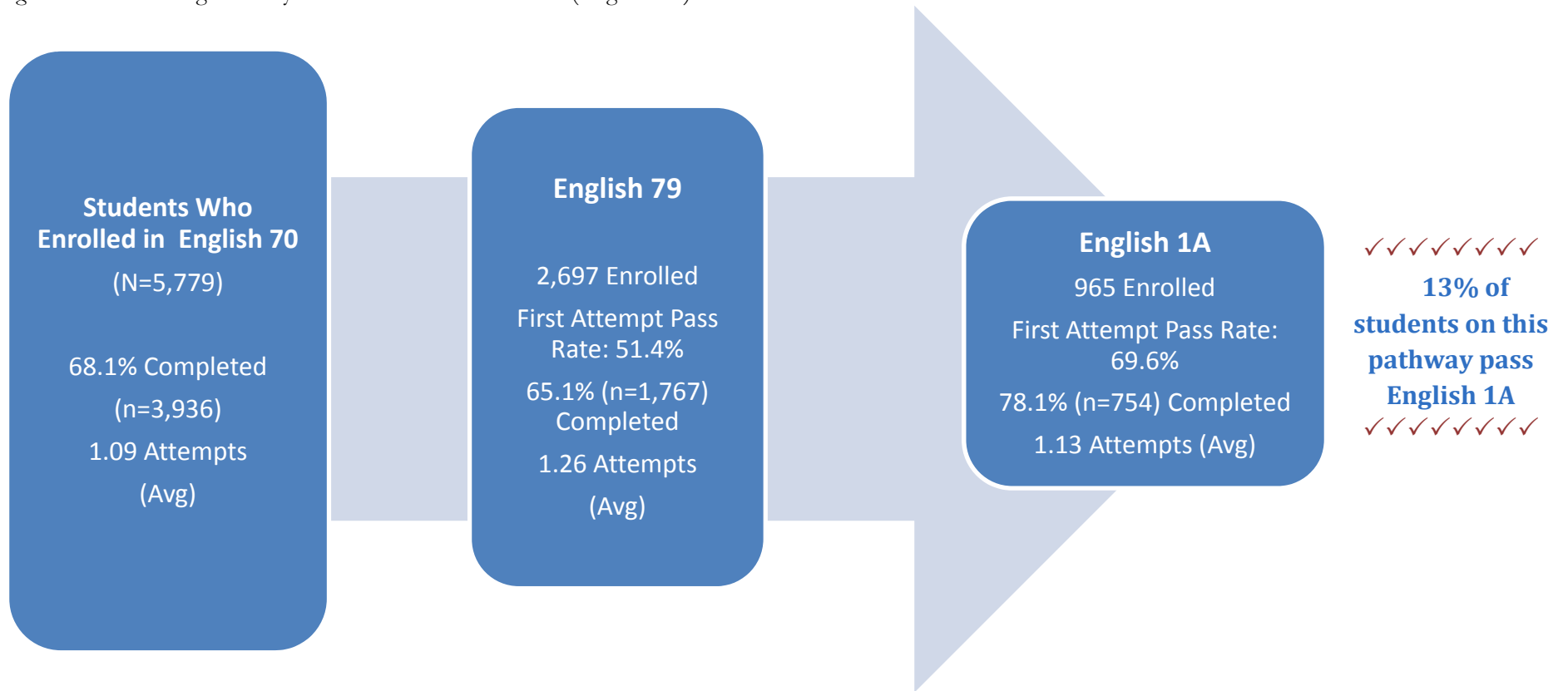
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Figure 1. Basic Writing Pathway to Written Communications (English 1A)



	English 70	English 79	English 1A	Total Cost
<b>Model Student (Assumes student passes on his/her first attempt)</b>				
Cost per FTES	\$1,619.58	\$1,708.14	\$1,485.39	\$4,813.10
Cost per Enrollment	\$274.36	\$286.69	\$266.25	\$827.29
<b>Average Student (Costs multiplied by average attempts required to pass course)</b>				
Cost per FTES	\$1,765.34	\$2,152.25	\$1,678.49	\$5,596.08
Cost per Enrollment	\$299.05	\$361.22	\$300.86	\$961.13