

# Fast Facts

## *REMEDIAL EDUCATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE COSTS AND BENEFITS*

### **WHAT**

Providing effective remediation for students who are struggling academically is an issue faced by every state in the nation. The demands of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Getting Past Go, are prompting many states to change the nature of their remediation policies or create entirely new policies to guarantee that they are in compliance with the new requirements for academic proficiency. Remediation is not clearly defined and can vary from institution to institution, but it is generally defined as coursework offered at a postsecondary institution (community college or 4-year) that is considered to be below college-level work. Remediation is also commonly referred to as: "developmental education", "basic skills training", or "non-traditional coursework". Although the issue of remedial education is currently a hot topic, and one of much debate, it is not new to higher education. Remedial education has been a part of higher education since the early colonial days. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with competition for students at many higher education institutions the number of underprepared students has grown. In short, throughout history there have been a number of events, such as: the G.I. Bill, Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Higher Education Act of 1965 and NCLB that have impelled an increase in the number of underprepared students attending College. The primary stakeholders are: the Federal government- many students receive funding from the government; the institutions offering remedial courses; the students who are enrolled in these remedial courses; the taxpayers whose taxes are funding the students; and the school districts from which these underprepared students emerged.

### **WHY**

Some of the key issues involved with remedial education on the post-secondary level are as follows: the gap between high school preparedness and college readiness; the success of remedial education; the impact of remediation to the reputation of the institution; the financial costs of remedial education; and the social and economic costs of not providing remediation. Critics of remedial education express concern that remedial education costs the taxpayers twice for teaching academic skills that students should have learned in high school. Proponents of remediation argue that remediation gives students a second chance, and better insures that students will be prepared for an increase in jobs that require some education beyond high school.

### **HOW**

Over three-fourths (78%) of postsecondary institutions that enroll freshman offer at least one remedial course in either: reading, writing or mathematics (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). Many institutions have a cohort of students known as "triple remedial", because they are taking all three remedial courses simultaneously. Percentages are highest at public two year institutions, institutions with high minority enrollments, and public 4-year institutions. The Higher Education Act of 1985 specifies the amount of Title IV Federal financial aid that can be applied to paying for remedial courses, but does not dictate where services should be provided. More than half of the states permit both universities and community colleges to offer remedial courses, but many consider community colleges to be the primary providers.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Change the name from "Remedial" to something more neutral to eliminate the stigma associated with remediation.
- Develop a standard definition of "underprepared" so that the term "remedial" has a consistent meaning across all institutions. In conjunction with the RTT-ELC grant competition which focuses on improving early learning and development programs for young children- defining "underprepared" should be addressed.
- Raise high school standards and requirements for graduation so that they are consistent with what is needed to be successful in college. The adoption of the Common Core Standards will enable students to be confident that their k-12 education will lead to college, skills training or the workplace.
- Carry out diagnostic testing in high school to alert students to their deficiencies. Under NCLB states are required to test children in reading and math every year in grades 3-8. States should also be required to tests high school juniors to determine if they will be ready to handle college level material.