

# The CAPacity Gazette



February 2019

## Dispatches from Community Colleges Transforming Remediation

Because students have the capacity to succeed in challenging courses and we have the capacity to support them



### Citrus College: Ahead of Schedule for AB 705

*As many California community colleges struggle to be ready for the fall 2019 deadline for [AB 705](#) – a new law that restricts colleges from requiring remedial English and math courses – Citrus College has already made sweeping changes to ensure that students are successful under the law.*

#### Remedial English Courses Eliminated, All Students Begin in College Composition

By Leslie Henson

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#### 100% of Students Eligible for Corequisite Model of College Statistics

By Hal Huntsman

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# Remedial English Courses Eliminated, All Students Begin in College Composition

By Leslie Henson

## Citrus College

In fall 2018, Citrus College became the first community college in the state to eliminate remedial English courses. That semester, every student began their English coursework in a transferable, college-level course, either in a standard section or one with additional corequisite support.<sup>1</sup>

It was a big change from the prior year, when only 53% of students enrolled directly in a transferable English class, and more than 1,200 students took remedial courses. Yet despite this dramatic increase in access, pass rates for college composition remained steady – 63% in fall 2018, compared to 64% in fall 2017.

Among the 800+ students who previously would have been placed into remedial English, researcher Lan Hao says 60% succeeded in college composition with support, a completion rate almost double that of traditional remedial courses. The previous fall, just 35% of students starting in remedial English completed college composition in a year.

Overall, first-time student completion of the course has increased from 54% in a year in 2017-18 to 65% in fall 2018, with the one-year completion rate expected to grow as more students take the course in spring 2019. Completion was higher across all racial/ethnic groups, with particularly strong gains among African-American and Hispanic students. First-time African-American students' completion of college composition increased from 40% in 2017-18 to 53% in fall 2018. First-time Hispanic students' completion rose from 50% in 2017-18 to 63% in fall 2018.

English faculty member Becky Rudd says that the changes were sparked in October 2017, when she and other English faculty attended presentations showing how other colleges were increasing completion through corequisite remediation. (See, for example, [Up to the Challenge](#) and [A Seat at the Table](#).) With support from Dean Gina Hogan, the department decided to make sweeping changes:

- Increasing college composition from three units to four units,
- Lowering the class size for college composition from 30 to 25 students,
- Adding a one-unit corequisite support course that could be linked to certain sections of composition and taught by the same instructor, to provide additional support for students who previously would have taken remedial courses,
- Embedding tutors in every corequisite section,
- Updating the composition curriculum from a focus on literature to a focus on thematic courses that integrate fiction, non-fiction, new media, and scholarly texts,
- And removing all sections of remedial English from the course schedule.

The department held a campus-wide forum and presented wherever they could on campus to ensure that the changes wouldn't "come as a surprise to anyone," Rudd says. "You don't make these sorts of changes in a silo."

**"We wanted to lower teachers' fear of these changes," says instructor Jamie Dingman, "by showing them what the course looks like on a day-to-day, minute-by-minute basis."**



<sup>1</sup> English enrollment data does not include English language learners taking classes in the separate ESL program.

## Student Spotlight: Catalina Belleza

There were some technical challenges enrolling the students in the linked corequisite, Rudd says, “but we never heard anyone say, you can’t do this.” People understood the purpose of AB705, she says, partly because of the department’s previous work to streamline their reading and writing sequence in response to research showing “students bleeding out” of remediation and never making it to transfer-level courses.

Still, many teachers in the program were nervous about how to support a broader range of students in college composition, and some part-time teachers hadn’t been able to participate in the department’s discussions about the new curriculum.

To address these issues, the department met throughout spring and summer to prepare model curriculum for teachers to share. They held a one-day training in August 2018 focused on using thinking-based curriculum and other [pedagogical principles](#) from the California Acceleration Project, and they stored the curriculum in an online Canvas site for faculty, including essay assignments and daily lesson plans.

“We wanted to lower teachers’ fear of these changes,” says instructor Jamie Dingman, “by showing them what the course looks like on a day-to-day, minute-by-minute basis.”

Teachers have noticed that the course includes more first-time students and students with a broader range of experiences with academic writing. Dingman says she is able to teach to this range by “not getting sucked into the minutiae of intense grammar and syntax scrutiny” and putting most of her attention on “higher-order issues, students’ ideas, and their attempts to join academic conversations.”

“In the past, we kind of expected students to know what to do when they enter college,” says part-time instructor Shanyn Hanson. “Now, we’re focused on helping them to understand how college is different and guiding them to that success instead of just hoping they’d find it.”

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### Citrus College

Citrus College student Catalina Belleza was a C student in high school and not confident about her reading and writing. “Ever since I was a kid I always struggled with reading comprehension,” she says. “I always had to read 3-4 times before I could understand.”

In fall 2018, Belleza enrolled in Jamie Dingman’s college composition with attached corequisite support, a fast-paced class with 6 essays to write and a full-length book and many scholarly articles to read. The class read *Orange is the New Black*, and every few chapters, students discussed the book in small groups they called “book clubs.” Each student had a job to do, such as keeping track of new vocabulary, conducting research, or formulating discussion questions. “It was really fun,” Belleza says, and the collaborative activities helped her to understand the book so much better.



Belleza remarks that in her other classes, teachers often say, “In a week, bring in your whole draft.” But in College English with support, she says, “We did it in steps – an outline first, then a rough draft, then a revised draft.” They worked on improving drafts in class, met with tutors during class and at the Writing Center, and got a lot of individual feedback.

“Growing up, I didn’t get the best grades,” she says, but in her corequisite English class, “I improved in my reading and writing so much. I got an A on one of my essays and it made me think, *I really can do this better.*”

Belleza is majoring in criminal justice and hopes to transfer to San Diego State and become a crime scene investigator. She’s using the techniques she learned in English in her other classes, and she’s on track to graduate in spring 2020.

# 100% of Students Eligible for Corequisite Model of College Statistics

By Hal Huntsman

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## Citrus College

In fall 2018, inspired by work underway at [Cuyamaca College](#), Citrus College launched a corequisite support model of college statistics open to all students, regardless of their test scores or high school grades. The course enables students to bypass traditional remedial courses and enroll directly in math that counts toward a bachelor's degree, also known as "transfer-level" math, providing additional corequisite support to help them be successful.

Nearly 500 students enrolled in the course in fall, and 63% passed, slightly out-performing students in the standard statistics course without corequisite support (59%).

College-wide, first-time student completion of transfer-level math has doubled – from 28% in a year (2017-18) to 59% in one semester (fall 2018), with higher completion across all racial and ethnic groups. The one-year completion rate is expected to further increase as more students take transfer-level math in spring.

Building upon this success, Citrus is now creating corequisite support for business calculus and precalculus, so that by fall 2019 all students will have access to a transfer-level course relevant to their program of study.

"The structural part is the easy part," says Michael Wangler, Dean of Mathematics and Business. "Ninety percent of the work is figuring out how to teach these classes."

To prepare for the new corequisites, Citrus math faculty began meeting regularly in the spring of 2018 and participated in weekly meetings throughout the summer. They invited a Cuyamaca instructor to lead two pedagogy workshops, drew upon Cuyamaca's curricular materials, and defined three guiding principles for their work:

- First, and foremost, believe in student capacity to succeed and learn, and express that belief to the students in every way possible.
- Second, be true to yourself as a teacher; the belief in student capacity can be expressed through different approaches; cookie-cutter methods don't work, because teachers are as unique as their students.
- Third, maintain the rigor of the courses; the transfer-level courses with support should be at the same level as the same course without support.

As the semester got underway, faculty continued meeting once a week to strategize together about teaching challenges. "The classroom was noisy," says Victoria Dominguez. "I wasn't used to it, but I really liked the student engagement that came with the noise. I was doing several new things I'd never done before in my teaching career: switching the student groups 2-3 times during one class session, managing the calculator lending and trying out new activities. Some activities were great, but others didn't work so well, and needed some tweaking. Also, some of the students were resistant to the new approach."

Faculty member Toros Berberyan stresses that it's important to address the emotional factors that can impede student success: "How students see themselves psychologically makes all the difference. It's not the math. It's how confident they are about doing the math." In addition to weekly math meetings, Berberyan has been attending the college's Student-Centered Teaching Series, monthly full-day workshops where affective activities are often discussed.

Dominguez agrees. "When we walked into class the first day and through the first few weeks, the room was buzzing with excitement, but also some fear – it's what most first days of math classes are like," she recalls. "The affective domain activities helped calm the class, and as we created new materials to support them and build their confidence, the students became more comfortable."

As faculty made adjustments in response to student feedback, students told them that, for first time in their lives, they really understood math.

"This is the first math class that I've had an A the whole way through," says student Samantha Proctor. "I've always had to retake math classes with F's and D's."

Wangler emphasizes the need for administrative support for these changes. "It's my job as the dean to make sure that instructors have the tools they need to help students succeed," he said, such as buying additional white boards and manipulatives, securing funds for professional development, trouble-shooting registration glitches, making embedded tutors available for every corequisite course, and scheduling the classes in the math building so that tutors and counselors are always close at hand.

"None of the systems we have built can handle the changes we are making," Wangler says, quoting Cuyamaca faculty leader Terrie Nichols. "So we have to build new systems that do."

## Lessons Learned: When Students Under-Place Themselves

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### College of the Canyons

Before AB705, College of the Canyons was one of the first colleges to substantially broaden access to transferable, college-level math by using high school grades for placement. In fall 2016, 71% of students became eligible for college statistics, up from 15% eligible for transfer-level math the prior year.

Students who took advantage of the policy saw substantial benefits: 66% passed statistics on their first attempt, a completion rate more than five times higher than among students who started in a remedial course below transfer level the prior year. (See CAP report [Up to the Challenge](#)).

But many students did not benefit. In fact, 80% of the students who were eligible for statistics chose to take a remedial algebra course instead, even though the vast majority did not need it for their intended major. When given the choice of two placements – one a remedial course and one transfer-level – counselors say some students felt that statistics was “scary” and unfamiliar compared to algebra courses they’d already taken in high school. Other students thought a STEM path was the only way to make good money after college, or that taking remedial algebra would keep their options open.

What they likely didn’t realize was that choosing remedial algebra significantly reduced their chance of completing a transferable, college-level course. Just 13% of students who began in remedial algebra completed a transfer-level course at the college that year – 188 out of 1,438 students.

Sab Matsumoto, math department chair during the change, says what happened is like that line from the Kevin Costner baseball movie – If you build it, they will come. “If you keep offering the developmental courses, they will take them,” says Matsumoto. “But instead of a field of dreams, it’s a field of nightmares.”

**“If we include developmental courses as an option,” says Serpas, “students who lack confidence will place themselves there and be less likely to complete their goals.”**

## Do No Harm Guided Self-Placement

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### Irvine Valley College

Beginning in fall 2019, all Irvine Valley College students will get to choose whether to take college composition or college composition with corequisite support. Through IVC’s new guided self-placement tool, students with recent high school GPAs of 2.6 and up will be recommended to the standard composition course; all others will be recommended to enroll in corequisite support.

“We are guiding them by telling them what we know – that their GPA predicts which path they will benefit more from,” says English Professor Summer Serpas. “But ultimately, the student makes the choice.”

IVC’s English department chose not to include standalone remedial courses on the self-placement tool because completion in corequisite models is so much higher. “If we include developmental courses as an option,” says Serpas, “students who lack confidence will place themselves there and be less likely to complete their goals.”



## Opening Transfer-Level Math to All Students

By Hal Huntsman

### Foothill College

"We realized that, despite the message we'd been sending for years, it wasn't that our students weren't ready for college," says Patrick Morriss, a math instructor at Foothill College. "It was that our college wasn't ready for our students."

Morriss says that in fall 2017, when he and his colleagues saw that AB 705 recognized placement tests and pre-collegiate sequences as barriers to student success and equity, they made a commitment to make their college student-ready as soon as they could.

Less than a year later, with support from their dean, the rest of the administration, and the college curriculum committee, the math department began allowing all students to self-place into any entry-level transferable math course – statistics, precalculus, math for liberal arts, and math for elementary school teachers.

To support students in these courses, Foothill provides peer tutors and supplemental instructors, and some students are required to enroll in corequisite support along with the first quarter of precalculus.

First-quarter results suggest the approach is working. The prior year, when student access to statistics was restricted, 68.6% of students passed the course. With open enrollment, the success rate dropped slightly to 62.1%, but faculty expect that to improve as they adjust their pedagogy for the broader student population in the class.

The results from precalculus are even more encouraging. That course had a 62.1% success rate in the 2017-18 academic year. In fall 2018, 61.9% of students passed precalculus with corequisite support.

These completion rates are nearly three times higher than students taking a traditional remedial path. During the previous year, just 22.6% of students who started in one of Foothill's below-transfer-level courses went on to complete a transfer-level math course within three quarters.

Morriss debunks critiques he's heard that Foothill College, located in the affluent neighborhood of Los Altos Hills, has stronger students than many other places in California. "We are in a rich area," he responds, "but the majority of our students are not from here. They commute from around 50 different zip codes."

Demand for statistics is way up, and Morriss reflects that, "things are different, but not as much as you might think." For example, he notices that though more students make notation mistakes, like turning 0.95 into 0.95%, their statistical reasoning is as good as before. "Students are more than capable of understanding the concepts and making sound statistical decisions," he says.



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# Open-Access Liberal Arts Math and Other Innovations

By Hal Huntsman

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## College of the Redwoods

For years, College of the Redwoods faculty have seen that the less time students spend in remediation, the better they do. The college was an early implementer of using high school grades for placement and offering accelerated courses in English and math, so when AB705 came along, a team of faculty champions was ready to act.

A year ahead of the deadline, the college replaced placement tests with workshops that place students based on course of study, high school GPA, and other factors. Faculty also began navigating curricular complexities in math, where students in different programs face different requirements.

The math department started by focusing on courses that serve the majority of students – those outside of math-intensive business and STEM fields. In spring 2018, they removed the intermediate algebra prerequisite on contemporary mathematics – also known as liberal arts math – and made this transferable course open to all students. In the past, they could barely fill one section, but in the fall they had four over-enrolled sections.

That first semester success rates in the course dipped from 74% to 61%. Still, this transfer-math completion rate was more than three times higher – in one semester – than the one-year rate for students who began below transfer-level the prior year (18.6%).

“With some collaboration and in-house professional development we can start fine tuning the design,” says faculty member Levi Gill. “Basically what I see is a bunch more potential yet to be realized.”

After their work in liberal arts math, faculty developed one-unit concurrent support courses for college algebra and college statistics. Students in the lowest GPA band of the state’s [default placement rules](#) will be recommended to these classes, but no one will be required to enroll. Students who want to pursue a business or STEM pathway and have not taken algebra 2 will be recommended to intermediate algebra, one-level-below transfer, but this will not be required.

Faculty have also been working closely with their colleagues across campus to address the math needs of other disciplines, including the college’s career-technical education (CTE) programs. “Students told us that the only reason they got a certificate instead of an AA or AS was to avoid the math required for a degree,” says Gill, so the department created a CSU-transferable CTE math course that includes topics like number sense, statistics, exponents, ratios, proportions, and trigonometry. They also developed half- and one-unit short-term review courses targeting the algebra students need in chemistry.

“It’s been really important to have conversations with counselors, administrators, and folks all over campus, so everyone understands the changes we are going through,” said Buntin. “We’re working together to make this transition as seamless as possible.”

All these changes mean substantial shifts in the course schedule for fall 2019, with many more sections of statistics, contemporary math, and math for CTE students. The college is currently planning to offer just one section of intermediate algebra, one section of pre-statistics, and one section of noncredit pre-algebra. However, no students will be placed into these classes, and students who wish to take them will have to complete an informed consent that notifies them of their rights under the law and makes sure they understand the implications of their choice.

With the structural changes in place, Redwoods faculty are now turning their attention to developing course material for instructors to use, providing professional development to help faculty teach classes they haven’t previously taught, and training the embedded peer tutors that will work in- and out-of-class with students.

Gill says that teaching the college’s accelerated pre-statistics course for three years prepared him for the changes of AB 705. “Even students who came in with basic arithmetic skills were passing transfer-level statistics with some of the best analysis I’d seen,” he says. “So asking us to make the leap with direct placement into transfer-level mathematics really wasn’t a gamble for me. I knew they could do it.”

**“The look of relief in student faces when you tell them they no longer have to take several levels of algebra and can take math that directly pertains to their degree and, oh yeah, there are extra support options, too – that says it all for me,” says faculty member Amber Buntin.**

## Student Spotlights: Cuyamaca College

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*In 2016, Cuyamaca College was the first community college in the state to eliminate most remedial math courses and enable students to enroll directly in transferable, college-level courses with corequisite support, a change that increased completion of transfer-level math among underprepared students from 10% to 67%. (See the CAP publication [Leading the Way.](#))*

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### Dawod Rafoka

Dawod Rafoka immigrated to the U.S. four and a half years ago with the dream of becoming a computer engineer. After a year of working, he entered his local community college with high hopes, and he was excited by the result of his math placement test – 88 – because it sounded like a good score. It turned out to be Math 88, prealgebra, the lowest course at the college and three levels below a transferable course. He faced three or more years of math to complete his major requirements.

Discouraged, Rafoka thought “math wasn't for me” and changed his major to graphic design, English, and social science, for which he only needed to take statistics. In those pre-AB 705 days, he still faced four semesters of math for this pathway, but Rafoka was determined to do his best. He enrolled in prealgebra and earned 98%, then elementary algebra, where he earned an A. When a counselor told him he was eligible to skip the next remedial course and enroll in the college's new corequisite support model of statistics, he jumped at the chance.

For Rafoka, statistics with support was a turning point. “The professor didn't have to rush through the material,” he remembers. “There was more time to explain and answer questions. I understood more than before, and I realized I was pretty good at math.” With encouragement from his teachers, Rafoka decided to jump back to computer engineering. He signed up for precalculus in the summer session and earned over 95%, then went on to complete calculus I, II, III, and differential equations and earn an award for outstanding achievement in mathematics.

### Luis León

After high school, Luis León was working with his father, mostly doing manual labor, when he decided he wanted to attend college and become an entrepreneur. He enrolled in Cuyamaca College in 2014, and the placement test put him in elementary algebra, a year away from math that would count toward a bachelor's degree. He passed that first remedial class, but then he tried three times to pass the next one without success.

“That almost stopped me,” León recalls. “I put my academic career on hold.”

Then in spring 2018, León got a chance to bypass intermediate algebra and take statistics with an attached corequisite, because Cuyamaca had realized that students like León could do well in transfer-level math if they got the right support. He found the class straightforward and easy to follow, and he earned an A.

With that success under his belt, the next semester he enrolled in applied calculus with corequisite support. The class was more challenging, but León discovered that if he worked with his classmates and spent the time he needed in class and outside of class, he could succeed. He earned a C+. “That class was a big stepping stone for me and for lots of the other students,” León says. He is on track to transfer to San Diego State University by fall 2019.

When asked what advice he'd give to other students taking classes like these, León recommends: “Be prepared. Read the syllabus. Make friends and work with them.” For other colleges, he suggests, “Try support classes. The data show it works.”



### The California Acceleration Project

Supporting the State's 115 Community Colleges to Transform Remediation to Increase Student Completion and Equity

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