
Essential Elements

1. Student Eligibility. Colleges set the developmental reading and writing course entry targets with an eye for serving the greatest need by selecting the course level in their sequence where the majority of developmental students have historically placed. Math entry targets are set more broadly to accommodate students at various levels. Selection decisions are firmly based on the criteria below:

- H.S. diploma or GED.
- 18-26 years old.
- Commitment to and ability to pay for enrollment as a full-time student through degree completion.
- Commitment to take at least one course each summer term.
- Expressed goal of achieving a certificate or degree (assessed in one-on-one interview).
- Placement into developmental reading and writing within the entry range set by the college.
- Ability to take the learning community classes at the required time and day on the specified campus.

2. Recruitment

- Partnerships within the college and with local high schools and community based organizations are forged to establish a recruitment pipeline.
- Students are actively recruited by Project DEgree staff.

3. Testing, Selection, and Enrollment. Students are selected and enrolled based on meeting eligibility requirements described in Essential Element #1. In addition:

- Selected students receive a monetary incentive for making adequate progress towards a locally determined goal (e.g., attendance or homework benchmark); great goals are specific, short-term, serve as building blocks to degree completion, and achievement is within the students control; great incentives are need-based and easy to administer logistically
- Selected students take a reading, writing, and math diagnostic test just prior to, or during, the first week of class. Diagnostic results are provided to the reading, writing, and math content faculty to tailor instruction for each student.
- Enrollment is capped at 25 students per learning community. Enrollment targets are outlined as an attachment to the Project DEgree contract.

4. Student Progress

DEgree Year One

All students begin in a learning community of 20-25 students. They take developmental level coursework in reading, writing, and a college success course as a learning community. They receive math instruction including supplemental tutoring based on individual placement scores. Each learning community is assigned a resource specialist (coach, mentor, advisor, college success instructor) who works intensively with each student during his or her first year at the college.

Students progress as a learning community taking the next sequence of reading and writing courses, plus a study skills course. Students are also individually enrolled in the next needed math class and continue to be offered supplemental supports. The resource specialist teaches the college success and study skills courses in order to

provide more holistic support by getting to know students as individual learners. Students are encouraged to take a 12 credit load each term and expected to take a class during summer term.

DEgree Year Two

Students have begun to fully transition into college-level coursework and work toward a certificate or degree. They are supported by a completion advisor who works in collaboration with other advising staff providing “intrusive advising” and connecting students to college resources and supports as needed.

- 5. Integrated Leadership.** Project DEgree demands intentional institutional action in order to meet the goal of significantly increasing persistence and degree completion rates of students starting in developmental education. Project success is shared among stakeholders from distinct areas of the college in order to create a comprehensive approach to buy-in and decision making. Communication of program goals, progress, and implementation transcend departmental boundaries in order to promote shared accountability for student success throughout the pipeline.
 - A management team is in place and comprised of college stakeholders with leadership duties in the areas of academics, counseling, and student support services.
 - Key program staff report to a project lead (e.g., developmental education dean) with the sufficient influence needed to garner buy-in and manage the change process.
 - The team meets regularly during both program planning and implementation phases.

- 6. Staffing.** Program staff is experienced and passionate about innovative teaching and support as a means of increasing the success of developmental education students. The staffing plan includes a full-time resource specialist (coach, mentor, advisor, college success instructor); reading, writing, and math faculty; and tutors. A completion advisor is hired to support students once they transition into college-level coursework.
 - Each learning community has been assigned a resource specialist dedicated to working with students during year one. The case load for this resource specialist is capped at 50.
 - Any college bargaining unit agreements or counseling department protocols have been addressed in order to allow the resource specialist to teach the college guidance courses.
 - Faculty, resource specialists, and support staff are hired with an agreement to work with an instructional coach who is provided to help with curriculum design and to support the use of innovative classroom methods. Coaching work includes classroom observations.
 - Faculty, resource specialists, and support staff are hired with the expectation that they will participate in regular program meetings and will collaborate on curriculum design across content areas. (See collaboration section below.)

- 7. Collaboration.** Project DEgree relies on a team-based approach to student success. The resource specialist and completion advisor form tight relationships with faculty and college support services staff. Faculty collaboratively design curriculum across content areas and work together to support student progress during DEgree year one. Students rely on each other as supports and resources. Forming positive peer groups is part of the transformative power of Project DEgree.
 - A meeting structure has been created and extra faculty contact hours have been budgeted for weekly collaborative planning time (1-1.5 hours per week, with flexibility to cluster time).
 - A plan is in place to promote team-building and collaboration among entering students as well as among program staff.
 - Students form study groups and align themselves with others with like goals.

- 8. Teaching and Learning.** Learning community curriculum inspires personal and academic development and is a catalyst for scaffolded growth. Students are given high expectations and regularly engage in a rigorous, integrated, coherent curriculum relevant to 21st century work and their lives.
- College success topics are integrated into the core subjects.
 - Classes are linked across the developmental education disciplines via thematic units, projects, and service learning.
 - Instruction is learner-focused; instructors use an active, collaborative pedagogy that fosters a sense of community among students.
 - Projects and collaborative activities are the basis for teaching course content, not viewed as add-ons.
- 9. Student Support.** Student support is woven into the fabric of Project DEgree both in and out of the classroom. Students reflect on their growth, and their success is celebrated regularly and zestfully. Partnerships within and outside of the college allow staff to serve students holistically and comprehensively.
- All staff understand the student target population – their profiles, challenges, and backgrounds.
 - Team members are trained in solution focused communication strategies and intervention techniques; positive student behaviors and successes are recognized formally and informally.
 - Resource specialists schedule regular one-on-one goal-setting sessions with students.
 - All students have a graduation plan; the resource specialist or completion advisor reviews the graduation plan with each student each term.
 - Wrap-around support services are identified (e.g., clinical counseling, child care, housing); students are actively connected to existing colleges services.
- 10. Professional Growth and Continuous Improvement.** Project DEgree has a strong culture of professional development and continuous improvement. Individual development becomes the norm, not the exception. Team members share good ideas and rely on each other for input and feedback. Self-transformation is part of the culture and is expected from team members and students alike.
- Team members participate in an annual Peer Learning Conference.
 - Faculty collaboration time is embedded into approved teaching hours.
 - Faculty and staff are committed to personal and professional growth and regularly visit each others' classrooms giving and receiving feedback and support.
 - Team members are encouraged to develop innovative approaches to teaching and support.
 - Program leaders recognize and reward the hard work of the team.
 - Team members are trained in methods for data-driven decision-making. Qualitative and quantitative data (e.g., surveys, course outcome data, persistence data, student work) are used by the team for continuous improvement at the program and individual levels.