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# REINFORCED INSTRUCTION FOR STUDENT EXCELLENCE (RISE)

## Faculty Report Spring 2019

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## Executive Summary

The RISE evaluation team conducted an evaluation of the faculty experiences teaching in co-requisite and transition courses this semester at the 14 pilot schools. In March 2019, we conducted two focus groups, one for faculty teaching co-requisite courses and one for faculty teaching transition courses. Over 100 faculty members participated between the two sessions. Faculty feedback is essential to understanding the successes, barriers, and creative solutions during this pilot of RISE.

First, we want to share that by and large, faculty feel that students are being accurately placed by the RISE placement process. These support the findings from our student focus groups, that suggested students also feel that they are placed at the appropriate level for their skills ([see RISE Student Focus Group Report](#)). This early feedback suggests that the RISE placement strategy of using high school GPA places students in the appropriate course for their skill level.

In the cases where faculty did not feel students were placed properly, they believe that these students were the most-at-risk and likely need more support through basic skills in order to be successful (see Finding 6. for further discussion). This group is likely similar to the students who under multiple measures would have been placed in DRE 096 or DRE 097. We also identified findings related to course scheduling and delivery method; communication; and course content and resources. A summary of the findings and recommendations are discussed below:

**Course Scheduling & Delivery Method.** Colleges are trying multiple scheduling and course delivery strategies. These strategies provide students with options around when to take the courses and the option to take the courses in-person, hybrid, or fully online. We recommend that colleges continue to try varying strategies to understand which schedules and course delivery modes work best for their students. Additionally, we recommend that colleges offer transition and co-requisite courses during all semesters, including summer. Options to include late-start 12 or 8 week classes might also allow a student who moves quickly through the transition course to also start their gateway course with or without a co-requisite.

**Communication.** Gateway faculty instructors are communicating with fellow co-requisite instructors at varying levels. We recommend that colleges continue building frequent channels of communication between co-requisite and gateway course instructors. Instructors discussed how having high levels of communication promoted content alignment. This finding supports what students said regarding the importance of instructor communication (see RISE Student Focus Group Report).

**Course Content & Resources.** Co-requisite course faculty members expressed some confusion about what course content should be prioritized in teaching the course. Based on



best practices shared by faculty, we recommend that the co-requisite course cover content related to the gateway course, prerequisite knowledge, and soft skills. Transition faculty generally believed the NROC software worked well in their courses, but expressed the need to incorporate outside content. We support the use of outside content. Faculty who are able to have tutors in the classroom expressed that this is of great value, we would highly encourage administrators to consider investing in this strategy.

## Purpose of this Report

The purpose of this report is to share what we have learned from faculty responsible for implementing RISE across our 14 NC Community Colleges in Spring 2019. We are interested in the teaching experiences of faculty in RISE co-requisite and transition courses during Spring 2019. Additionally, we want to understand the faculty perception of student placement and performance in their courses. This information is meant to inform RISE implementation and to aid colleges in making decisions to best promote student success and to meet the goals of RISE.

## Goals of RISE

There have been many developmental education reforms which have occurred over the last several years and success in gateway courses has improved but it has not improved quickly enough and for all students. The objective of RISE is to increase gatekeeper momentum and to begin to close the equity gap.

Goals of RISE include properly placing students into gateway level courses with or without mandated co-requisite support, elimination of a placement test (except for students more than 10 years out of high school and other rare cases), and raising the GPA criteria from 2.6 to 2.8.

- We aim to significantly improve the number of students who successfully pass gateway courses.
- We will place more students in gateway level math and English with mandated co-requisite support.
- We will provide one semester (or less) of developmental education to students entering the community college system with an unweighted high school GPA below 2.2 and more than two points below the ACT benchmarks.
- We will provide students with success skills, growth mindset activities, and soft skills in co-requisite and transition courses.
- We strive to ensure we are able to effectively collect data and assess the efficacy of RISE.
- We will eliminate placement testing, except for students more than 10 years out of high school and in other rare cases.

## Methods

### Data Collection

During March 2019, we conducted two online focus groups with faculty from the 14 RISE pilot colleges. The focus groups were split into two groups, the first group for faculty teaching co-requisite classes in Spring 2019 had 52 attendees. The second focus group for faculty teaching transition classes in Spring 2019 had 54 attendees.

We also attempted to learn more about the experiences of student services professionals (ie. registrars, advisors, etc) with RISE. We invited (via direct emails and the RISE listserv) student services professionals with the opportunity to attend an online focus group and to respond to a survey. Due to low response rates we are unable to present those findings as we are not confident that they are representative of the experiences of those professionals across the 14 institutions. Prior to future evaluations, we will work with leadership at institutions to identify additional strategies for connecting with student services professionals, we believe they offer valuable insight about the implementation of RISE

## Faculty Findings and Recommendations

### Finding 1: Placement (Co-requisite & Transition)

Faculty felt that most students in their co-requisite courses were properly placed. Faculty teaching the transition courses acknowledged while it seems most students are properly placed, there is still a subset of students who are not meeting the minimum skill level for the course. These students are facing difficulties with the lowest level content and are not progressing.

#### Recommendation: Placement

Based on our findings, we recommend opening the option for colleges to offer Transition coursework through Career and College Readiness (formerly Basic Skills). Some colleges are already offering this as an option and are placing students with below a certain GPA (e.g. 1.50) threshold in these courses. See further discussion in Finding 6.

### Finding 2: Scheduling & Course Delivery (Co-requisite & Transition)

There are a variety of ways in which colleges are scheduling both co-requisite and transition courses. Co-requisite courses are commonly scheduled on the same day as the gateway course, either before or after the course. Sometimes a co-requisite course is scheduled in between two gateway courses allowing students from both gateway courses to feed in to the same co-requisite course, assuming the gateway courses are taught by the same instructor. While faculty discussed concerns about the length of time students are in one subject area, they mentioned that scheduling on the same day helps with attendance. Other colleges scheduled co-requisite and gateway courses on alternating days. Transition courses are held in a variety of ways ranging from classes 2 days a week at 2 hours a day to classes 5 days a week for 1 hour, with the additional contact hours spent online. Co-requisite and transition courses are also being held in online and hybrid formats.

#### Recommendations: Scheduling & Course Delivery

Based on this feedback we recommend colleges continue trying different modes of course delivery and when possible, evaluate course outcomes by delivery method. We recognize that students learn differently and have differing constraints on their availability, so having multiple options may be the best way to support students. We continue to encourage that only students who have the same gateway instructor be placed in the same co-requisite class. Keeping students who have the same gateway instructor together helps to promote alignment between the co-requisite course and the gateway course.

### Finding 3: Communication (Co-requisite & Transition)

Faculty teaching co-requisite courses discussed a variety of communication patterns between themselves and the gateway course instructor. Some faculty never talked with the gateway instructor, others had weekly emailed correspondence or regular in-person meetings. Faculty who are communicating regularly with the gateway instructor felt this was beneficial to supporting students, identifying content related to the gateway course that they should cover in the co-requisite, and appropriately pacing the course content. Faculty teaching in transition courses do not have contact with instructors teaching gateway or co-requisite courses, unless they are also teaching a gateway or co-requisite course.

#### Recommendation: Communication

We recommend that colleges continue building regular means of communication between co-requisite and gateway course instructors. In some cases, it may be helpful for co-requisite instructors to observe gateway courses to help plan course content for their co-requisite class. As noted, in our student feedback report, students seem to be aware when their instructors are in conversation with one another and notice a positive difference in the alignment of course content. The question of whether or not transition course faculty should be communicating with co-requisite/gateway during the semester is not known. However, it may be useful for instructors to discuss to what extent students moving from the transition course to the co-requisite and gateway courses are prepared and areas of potential challenges.

### Finding 4: Course Content & Resources (Co-requisite only)

Faculty expressed confusion about what should be taught in the co-requisite course. Faculty at some institutions thought that they were not allowed to cover material being taught in the gateway course. Faculty are also concerned about the lack of soft skills of the students. This suggests that faculty are facing challenges balancing the multiple target areas of the course: gateway content, prerequisite skills, and soft skills. Faculty at a few institutions mentioned that they felt it would be beneficial if they were able to give students some homework assignments. They felt this would help to further promote what students are learning in the co-requisite and give them additional opportunities to practice certain skills. In terms of resources, faculty are bringing new content into the classroom, but still feel additional content is needed to support their teaching, including a diagnostic test to assess level at the beginning of the year, materials related to the gateway course and materials to help with soft skills. One college is utilizing required office hours to deliver content related to growth mindset.

## Recommendation: Course Content & Resources

Based on the feedback, we want to highlight that it is our expectation that the co-requisite course could cover content related to the gateway course, prerequisite knowledge, and soft skills. The co-requisite course time should not solely serve as a review of the content of the gateway course, but can be used to reinforce concepts from the gateway course which students are having difficulty or need additional review. We recommend that faculty members use and contribute to the shared google drive for lesson planning ideas and resources, as well as reaching out to your regional RISE coordinator for suggestions and professional development. The system office is also collecting teaching materials developed by faculty and housing the resources in a shared Google Drive available to all faculty and staff involved with RISE\*.

*\*If you have developed materials that you would like to be included in the Google Drive, we request that you reply to the RISE weekly email with the documents attached.*

## Finding 5: Course Content & Resources (Transition only)

Faculty expressed concern and challenges regarding the content and the structure of NROC. Students have said to faculty that they want to have a classroom instructor. In some cases, we know that faculty are delivering minilessons to provide some guided instruction. Faculty expressed frustration with the NROC system including need for more practice questions and reviews before unit tests. Faculty are concerned that students are able to skip the videos and practice sections and move directly to the tests. The latter is an issue if students are not mastering the material rather taking tests until they receive the grade needed to move on to the next section. In some cases, Transition course math faculty are manually grading exams. We also learned that faculty are removing the “weighted grading scheme.” This is a concern for the fidelity of the grades students. In terms of resources, faculty are creating new content to bring into the classroom, but noted that additional content such as practice problems would be valuable to their students.

Faculty who are able to have tutors in the classroom expressed that this is of great value and has helped with the instruction of the course. Other resources include individualized unit reviews for students who have failed unit tests multiple times (English) and the use of calculators (Math),

## Recommendation: Course Content & Resources

Based on these findings, we acknowledge that more structure is needed to prevent students from bypassing study and practice materials. We first want to note faculty are able to set the guidelines and expectations for the students in the course. We recommend that faculty create structured activities that students must complete before they are eligible to take the tiered test. While the system cannot prevent students from taking the test, instructors can require in-class activities, notebook checks, etc. Additionally, faculty can use the new reporting features to



determine the amount of time a student has spent in the study path. This will assist the instructor in determining if the student is ready to take the tier test.

We request that all faculty use the grading system and structure that is built into NROC rather than self-grading and changing the weighted grading structure.

While we allow colleges to set their own enrollment caps for the courses, when possible, we recommend colleges have tutors in the classroom to assist students and reduce the student to instructor/tutor ratio, near 10:1.

In terms of additional content, new test questions will be developed during summer 2019 to add to the test bank for subsequent semesters. With regard to practice problems: With regard to additional practice questions - faculty can create their own and/or use documents in the RISE drive. The system office is collecting teaching materials developed by faculty, including practice tests and housing these resources in a shared Google Drive available to all faculty and staff involved with RISE\*.

*\*If you have developed materials that you would like to be included in the Google Drive, we request that you reply to the RISE weekly email with the documents attached.*

## Finding 6: Wraparound Support (Transition)

Faculty expressed concerns about students who are falling far behind and need additional support in the transition course. Faculty noted that many of these students had unweighted GPAs that were very low or were in the developmental education model previous to RISE and would have been placed in DRE 096 or DRE 097.

### Recommendations: Wraparound Support

To address this concern, colleges could offer the transition course in Career and College Readiness (formerly Basic Skills). This course would still provide the same content as the curriculum course but would allow students to receive the individualized and contextualized support they need. Some colleges are already offering this as an option and are placing students with below a certain GPA (e.g. 1.50) threshold in these courses.

## Appendix A: Focus Group Questions

Welcome:

Thank you for joining today's focus group for faculty who teach co-req/transition courses, we know your time is valuable and we are grateful you are able to join us today. Our goal is to listen and learn from you all what is working well in implementing RISE and what challenges you are experiencing. In addition, we are interested in understanding what creative solutions you are using to work through these challenges.

While we welcome you to listen in, we would really appreciate any insights you can share as it will help us to develop best practices and share back with our learning community as other institutions begin RISE implementation.

The results of this focus group will be compiled into a short report that will be shared with all colleges. We will share the lessons learned but will not attach your name or college to the lesson, we hope everyone on the call can honor that same confidentiality.

Are there any questions before we get started?

As you answer a question it would be useful if you could begin with your name, college, and RISE course you teach. Ok, let's get started:

Thinking about this semester (the first semester RISE was implemented):

- Do you feel students have been properly placed, in either the transition course or the coreq course?
- How do think students are perceiving the transition and/or coreq courses?

Now, please:

- Do you have the tools/resources you need to be successful teaching this course?
  - If no, what would help to improve your experience?
- Thinking back to the beginning of the semester what resources do you wish you had?
- What resources have you brought in to support your students?
- Are you willing to share any additional resources you may have created for your class(es)?
- If you are teaching a gateway course and/or a transition course and another instructor is teaching the other please think about the communication between the two of you. Is this model working?
- How often, and how do you communicate with one another?



- How are your transition courses offered?
- How are your coreq courses offered?

Overall:

- Describe what's working well.
- Describe any challenges or barriers?