

# *Colorado Northwestern Community College*

## *Case Study Report – Data as of May 2013*

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2011, Colorado received a \$17.3 million Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant from the U.S. Department of Labor. The project funded by the grant, the Colorado Online Energy Training Consortium (COETC), has two principal purposes: 1) enhance the state's energy-related programming by redesigning curricula in more accessible formats using technology and mobile learning labs, and 2) develop and implement a redesign of the state's developmental education (DE) program. Project goals include expanding access to degree and certificate programs in energy-related fields, increasing retention and completion rates for certificate and degree programs at the community college level, and developing a trained workforce for the changing job market.

The COETC project involves the thirteen colleges in the Colorado Community College System (CCCS) and two local district colleges, Aims Community College (Aims CC) and Colorado Mountain College (CMC).

CCCS contracted with Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations (Rutgers) to be the COETC third-party evaluator. In this role, the Rutgers team created and implemented a multifaceted research assessment design that includes quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. A major component of Rutgers' COETC evaluation is a cohort study that compares the educational outcomes for students enrolled in traditional courses to those for students enrolled in COETC-developed and funded courses. In particular, this research focuses on the project's second goal. The study's objective is to assess the success of DE courses restructured under the guidelines developed by the Colorado State Task Force on Developmental Education Redesigns (State Task Force) and the success of the redesigned energy courses at the seven colleges participating in this facet of the project. Specifically, it will evaluate the impact of factors such as demographics, Accuplacer scores, course registrations, student grades, employment status, and wages on rates of retention, program completion, and employment after graduation. The methodology consists of quantitative analyses of student and course data from Fall 2011 through Spring 2014 along with qualitative analyses of student experiences.

Late in the Spring 2013 semester, Rutgers distributed four reports covering the data collected to date from individual colleges and from the consortium as a whole: "Integrated Year End Report," Career Coach Caseloads Analysis," "Redesigned Course Outcomes," and "Master Course List." This case study provides an interim report, based on data provided in these reports, on the progress of Colorado Northwestern Community College (CNCC) under the COETC grant. It includes data on DE redesigns as of May 2013 and coach caseloads as of September 2013.

The sections that follow: 1) outline the overall study methodology and data sources, 2) provide background information on CNCC and its student population, 3) summarize the goals and primary elements of CNCC's COETC program, 4) describe the redesigned DE courses (math

and English/reading) and present data on enrollment and outcomes, 5) assess the success of the career coaching program instituted by CNCC as part of its COETC program, and 6) offer recommendations for CNCC specifically and for the consortium colleges in general with regard to COETC-funded programs.

## **METHODOLOGY/DATA SOURCES**

### *Quantitative Analysis*

During the first project year, Rutgers worked closely with CCCS to refine the quarterly reports required from each of the system's participating colleges. Rutgers has used data from these reports to track progress and to provide the foundation for other data collection. In collaboration with CCCS, the district colleges, and college career coaches, Rutgers developed and revised an Electronic Student Case File (ESCF) to capture data relating to the COETC career coaches' work with grant-eligible students. The ESCF records demographic and academic information and tracks the issues and goals coaches and students work on as well as any referrals made. In addition, Rutgers designed a pre-course survey to collect information on student expectations about course work and career goals. The colleges administered this survey to students in both traditional and redesigned DE courses in Fall 2012.

The Rutgers team has also been working closely with CCCS and the district colleges to access the Banner student system (and CMC's data system) in order to track student progress and achievement and collect and analyze data for the cohort study.

### *Qualitative Analysis*

The Rutgers team's qualitative evaluation focuses on COETC process issues and the experiences of project team members and participating students, faculty, and staff at the fifteen colleges in the COETC consortium.

Analyses have included reviews of relevant documents; text answers on quarterly reports; ESCFs; pre-course survey results; and materials and websites developed by the State Task Force, CCCS, and individual colleges. Rutgers team members have conducted phone and in-person interviews with project leads, faculty members involved in the restructuring and teaching of DE and energy courses, instructional designers, data coordinators, senior college administrators, and, whenever possible, students. They conducted on-site interviews at CNCC on September 30 and October 1, 2013 and analyzed transcriptions of phone and in-person interviews to identify program achievements to date, best practices, and critical issues for follow-up. Some of the responses from these interviews are quoted in this report.

Team members have also participated in conference calls with project leads and career coaches and joined in webinars. In addition, they have observed and participated in forums, such as sessions on DE redesigns, sponsored by CCCS.

## **COLLEGE DESCRIPTION AND OVERVIEW OF STUDENT POPULATION**

Established in 1962, CNCC is a multi-campus residential college in the high plateau region of western Colorado. The area is very rural, economically dependent on ranching and the coal industry. CNCC's main residential campus sits on a hill over the town of Rangely, close to the Utah state border. About ninety miles east of Rangely is CNCC's Craig campus, which serves commuter students. Classes are also offered at satellite centers in Meeker and Oak Creek. The college joined the Colorado Community College System in 1999.

CNCC offers a variety of both academic and career-based programs. It is known for its aviation flight technology and aviation maintenance technology programs, as well as for programs in dental hygiene, nursing, and automotive technology, and also offers Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees. The college recruits student athletes from across the nation to participate in one or more of the college's well-known programs in baseball, basketball, softball, volleyball, and rodeo. Student athletes are resident at the Rangely campus.

In Fall 2011, 61 percent of CNCC students were enrolled part time. Approximately 29 percent of students came from minority backgrounds and 58 percent were female. About 36 percent of CNCC's faculty is employed full time at the college, with adjunct faculty making up the remaining 64 percent.<sup>1,2</sup>

## **CNCC'S COETC GOALS AND PRIMARY PROGRAM ELEMENTS**

CNCC did not submit an initial proposal for the COETC grant submission, but instead developed its goals after the grant was awarded. In its redesign, the college has sought to build on its previous DE reforms, continuing the successes of its modular courses in math and English, and to experiment with other strategies to improve students' progress into college-level courses.

An integral part of the COETC grant was the employment of a career coach. CNCC's goals for this position were to strengthen the college's relationship with the regional workforce and increase the college's recruitment of Trade Adjustment Assistant (TAA)-eligible workers. Further, the career coach was to inform students about the new online and hybrid energy programs available at other Colorado colleges and facilitate student enrollment in these programs. Given energy-related employment opportunities in CNCC's service region, there was hope that students could stay in place but benefit from the distance learning programs.

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<sup>1</sup> As of Fall 2013 55% of students are part-time; 17% are minority; 61% are female; 39-42.4 of faculty are part-time. Fall 2011 was used to remain consistent across all reports.

<sup>2</sup> Colorado Northwestern Community College Fact Sheet, Colorado Community College Sourcebook, pp. 9-10, <http://cccs.edu/Docs/Communication/sb/College%20Fact%20Sheets.pdf>

## CNCC'S REDESIGNED DE PROGRAM

Because of its large population of students who place into developmental courses, the college has longstanding concerns around retention and completion. CNCC, like other Colorado colleges, began work on its DE program prior to the award of the COETC grant and the establishment of the State Task Force. To clarify what was done when, in this report we label the work done prior to the COETC grant as Phase I, work that occurred under the COETC grant as Phase II, and changes made in response to the State Task Force recommendations as Phase III. This report will focus on Phase I and II activities.

In Phase I, faculty at CNCC found that modularizing developmental education gave students the opportunity to move through competencies at their own pace. Using this method, students could accelerate through the DE sequence in both English and math. Under COETC, CNCC decided to expand and build upon this work. Additionally, in Phase II, a mainstreaming aspect was made available to students in English who tested in the higher end of the Accuplacer score range for placement in an ENG 090 course. These students were permitted to enroll in ENG 121 instead of ENG 090, but were required to register for an additional lab time to further develop their ENG 090 skills.

### *Redesigned Course Outcomes*

To determine the ongoing effects of courses redesigned through the COETC grant, project leads reported information about their redesigned courses and the modalities used for developmental education. As of Spring 2013, CNCC had redesigned three unique DE course offerings and offered 53 sections of these courses, serving a total of 469 students. Approximately one-third of these sections were offered during the Spring 2013 term. Table 1 displays the rollout of these courses by term, along with the number of students served by these courses.

<b>Table 1: Number of CNCC Students Enrolled in Redesigned DE Courses by Term</b>		
<b>Term &amp; Year</b>	<b>Percent of Total Redesigned DE Population (All Subjects)</b>	<b>Number of Students (Redesigned DE Population)</b>
Summer 2012	5.6	26
Fall 2012	58.6	275
Spring 2013	35.8	168
Total	100.0	469

In terms of overall student retention, 83.4 percent of students (391) who registered for redesigned DE courses persisted in the courses, while 9.3 percent (44) dropped the course during the add/drop period and 7.3 percent (34) withdrew after the start of the term.

Table 2 presents the number of students enrolled in redesigned DE courses by subject. At CNCC, just over half (51.2 percent) of all enrollments in redesigned DE courses were in math courses, followed by English (32.8 percent) and reading (16 percent).

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Percent of Total Redesigned DE Population (All Terms)</b>	<b>Number of Students (Redesigned DE Population)</b>
English	32.8	154
Math	51.2	240
Reading	16.0	75
Total	100.0	469

Table 3 shows the number of students at CNCC enrolled in redesigned DE courses by course title.

<b>Course Title</b>	<b>Percent of Total Redesigned DE Population (All Terms)</b>	<b>Number of Students (Redesigned DE Population)</b>
Special Topics in English	32.8	154
Special Topics in Math	51.2	240
Special Topics in Reading	16.0	75
Total	100.0	469

Table 4 presents the mean of grades for each redesigned DE course. In the months ahead, the Rutgers team will perform further analysis of means, comparing section means to departmental means.

<b>Course Title</b>	<b>Course Mean</b>
Special Topics in English	2.5935
Special Topics in Math	2.2843
Special Topics in Reading	2.8871

## **ENGLISH / READING DE REDESIGN**

As mentioned above, CNCC redesigned DE in three phases to better serve students. The overall goal of these changes to the DE curriculum is to accelerate students through DE and give them the tools to move successfully into college-level coursework. The next section provides information on Phases I and II of that redesign in English and reading.

## *Innovative Models and Practices*

*Acceleration of reading and writing.* CNCC's development redesign began prior to the State DE Task Force's initiative. In Phase I, students had the option of registering for ENG 060 and ENG 090 in the same semester as two separate courses. ENG 060 curriculum was administered from August to October, with ENG 090 running from October to December. If the student did not succeed in ENG 060, they were unable to move into the ENG 090 curriculum.

*Reading/English Prep:* Beginning Fall 2012 CNCC provided students the option to accelerate their progress in Reading and English. Students who tested into any level between 030 and 090 had the option to enroll in ENG 075 (College English Prep I) and REA 075 (College Reading Prep I). Both of these courses were self-paced and used a modularized format and were preparation for college-level, ENG 121. If a student failed ENG 075 or REA 075e, they were required to retake it before proceeding in the developmental sequence. In some cases, students were attending class and working through the competencies, but were unable to complete the coursework by the end of the semester. CNCC allowed these students to receive a passing grade and enroll in ENG 076 or REA 076 to continue the competencies in the next semester.

*ENG 078 Lab:* Dependent on Accuplacer scores, students scoring in the higher range of the ENG 090 level were given the option to enroll in the ENG 121 college-level course. Those who chose this path were registered for ENG 078 lab class. This class was a co-requisite that supported the assignments students were receiving in ENG 121.

*Contextualization across disciplines.* At CNCC, DE students can enroll in college-level courses that do not have a DE prerequisite. Therefore, a DE student may be in an English reading course along with a college-level course in psychology or chemistry. In contrast to some of the other TAA colleges, CNCC faculty decided not to use a specific career/technical field, e.g., auto mechanics, or academic discipline to contextualize English and reading. Instead, the college developed an interdisciplinary approach. Students are asked to read and write about psychology, history, and chemistry in their English/reading course. This prepares students to read, comprehend, and write on topics across a broader academic spectrum.

## *Challenges*

*Overall acceleration.* Faculty recognize that acceleration can be beneficial to many students but remain concerned that it may be too much for some. Instructors are seeing students who are unable to read at a middle-school level, let alone at a college level. They worry that the establishment of acceleration as the only option will cause these students to struggle so much that they drop out. Some faculty members are concerned that lower-level students will not be properly served by the developmental program and will miss the opportunity to pursue their educational goals.

## MATH DE REDESIGN

### *Innovative Models and Practices*

*Competencies sequence.* Students were given the opportunity to register for a self-paced, modularized course based on competency mastery in the Accuplacer exam. CNCC math faculty hoped that the self-paced option would help to remove barriers attributed to schedules and course sequencing, and consequently improve retention. Students start the sequence at the beginning of a semester. They have access to both computer and paper modules and are required to put in twelve hours each week, at least four of them in class (the rest can be completed at home). The student-faculty ratio in these classes is about 10:1, with an instructor and a tutor available to help students as needed. Since students are working on different modules, there are no class lectures.

*ALEKS program:* Students who tested into MAT 030 registered for the modular-based ALEKS program. Upon successful completion of 030 level competencies within a given time frame, students moved into MAT 060 competencies. If students were unable to reach MAT 060 within the semester, they remained in MAT 030.

Based on the degree of competency achieved over the course of the semester, students either move on to college-level math (MAT 121) or continue in the DE curriculum in the next semester.

### *Challenges*

*High school learning gaps.* Faculty are finding significant gaps in math skills and knowledge among students coming from traditional high schools, while students who have earned a GED and home-schooled students have been exposed to more standardized and rigorous testing, and so tend to have a higher degree of competency. During interviews with the Rutgers team, faculty members recalled that the 030 level was not needed at CNCC ten years ago, but in recent years there has been an uptick in the number of students requiring lower-level remediation. This situation is concerning in light of the push for acceleration in developmental education, particularly math. The proposed elimination of the 030 level prompts concern, as well. Given the number of students who test into this level, faculty members are unsure how they will meet the needs of these students even using the soft landing options.

## CNCC'S CAREER COACH

The career coach position was established across the COETC consortium to facilitate students' access to careers in the energy sector and to assist students with non-academic issues that may inhibit their progress or affect their ability to complete a course of study. Coach functions were envisioned to include career counseling and referrals, academic advising related to career choices, and counseling and referrals for a wide range of social and financial support services. To conform to the intent of COETC, a student must meet one or more criteria to be eligible for

career coach services: participation in a redesigned DE course or a TAACCCT-supported energy course/program, eligibility for TAA (or similarity to TAA-eligible students), unemployment or underemployment, or eligibility for other U.S. Department of Labor programs.

CNCC assigned its Coordinator of Counseling and Career Planning to take on the responsibilities of the career coach in addition to her other duties. She also became CNCC's TAA project lead. The career coach has a Master's degree in counseling and experience in academic and student counseling. Prior to coming to CNCC, she worked with the elderly and with disabled individuals as a case manager. She is based at the Rangely campus, but travels the ninety miles to the Craig campus once each month.

The career coach has been marketed to the CNCC community as a resource for advising and career planning. The college, however, was uncomfortable with the grant's description of the career coaching approach as "intrusive" advising. Faculty and staff felt such a definition of the process was unfriendly, if not off-putting. They preferred "intentional advising" and have used this term to describe what the career coach does.

Similarly, CNCC did not feel the title "career coach" adequately conveyed the range of activities in which the Coordinator of Counseling and Career Planning was involved, or the dynamic interplay between academic advising and career planning inherent in her role. As a result, the college has continued to use the coach's CNCC title rather than call her the career coach. However, to maintain consistency across all case reports, the Coordinator will be referred to as the career coach in this report.

As these decisions illustrate, CNCC staff are very sensitive to terminology and how it shapes perceptions. The coach has thus shifted from marketing her services as career coaching, which brought few students into her office, to describing her work as advising or counseling services. This shift has attracted far more students, including students in DE courses.

In her role as Coordinator for Counseling Services, the coach is an integral part of the college's Early Alert system. Faculty and staff members also frequently refer students who are having significant academic or non-academic difficulties to the coach in her coordinator role. Through both these referral streams the Coordinator adds students to her coach caseload. She also has posted flyers on campus to alert students to the help she can offer.

The coach has found that being friendly, open, and nonjudgmental is the best strategy to engage students and begin a counseling relationship. During an on-site interview, the coach also observed that a sense of humor is a valuable tool in establishing relationships with students. She works to encourage openness in these relationships, as she described:

*My door is always open; you can come to see me for anything. Doesn't matter what it is. I may not be able to help you with that particular problem, but I know who does. For example, I don't provide financial aid, I tell them, well, you need to talk with Mary, and sometimes they're a little*

*afraid to talk with her. So I'll contact Mary and ask what do they need to do? Then I help bridge the gap.*

CNCC houses a satellite office of the Rangely Workforce Center in an office that abuts the Coordinator's. This facilitates bidirectional referrals and information sharing. For example, students often come to CNCC looking to enroll prior to visiting a workforce center. The WFC's campus location facilitates the immediate referral of prospective students to workforce staff who can then determine whether the student qualifies for educational funding. Under the COETC grant, the career coach and the Rangely WFC representative have partnered on activities such as career fairs, resume-building workshops in classrooms, and career planning at local high schools. The Craig campus also hosts a regional WFC, but it has been much harder to strengthen ties with the Craig WFC, given the distance between Craig and Rangely and the coach's limited presence in Craig.

### ***Electronic Student Case File***

The ESCF was developed to capture the work of the career coaches and to track students' progress toward their goals. It was hoped that data from the ESCF would contribute to an understanding of student challenges and best practices for intervention, as well as the impact of coaching services on retention and completion rates. The ESCF includes demographic and academic information, the issues and goals on which the coach and student work, and any referrals made.

Coaches open an ESCF for each eligible student with whom they meet, adding information with each visit and interaction. As of May 23, 2013, 76 percent (75) of the students registered by CNCC's coach had active files.<sup>3</sup>

### ***CNCC Career Coaching Targets and Eligibility***

CNCC set a career coaching target of 115 students. As of September 30, 2013, the coach had registered 140 students, 122 percent of that target.<sup>4</sup>

As stated above, eligibility for coaching services includes enrollment in a restructured DE and/or energy program supported by the COETC grant, eligibility for TAA assistance, or unemployment or underemployment.

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<sup>3</sup> An active ESCF file is defined by Rutgers as a "response in progress"; this means students' information has been entered into the ESCF, but is not yet submitted to the record. Career coaches can update information in an active ESCF. An inactive ESCF is a file that has been closed or submitted to the system by the career coach.

<sup>4</sup> All students registered by the career coach may not necessarily have active ESCF files. In order for the student to be considered registered, the career coach must have completed basic information, such as the student's ID number and name, but the coach may not have to open an ESCF. Alternatively, an ESCF for a student who has been served by the career coach may have been submitted, making it inactive.

After reviewing active ESCF files and cross-referencing these with students enrolled in redesigned courses, as certified by the project lead, Rutgers determined that 88.6 percent of CNCC students registered by the career coach were eligible for services. Table 5 shows the eligibilities of the students seen by the coach and the breakdown of students by category of eligibility. The majority of students were enrolled in a redesigned DE course. Only 0.7 percent of students were recorded as TAA-eligible and 9.3 percent as TAA-like. Students with unknown eligibility status for Fall 2013 made up 11.4 percent of the population receiving services, a significant decrease from Spring 2013.

<b>Table 5: CNCC Summary of Student Eligibility</b>				
<b>Eligibility Criteria</b>	<b>May 2013</b>		<b>September 2013</b>	
	<b>Percent</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>N</b>
TAA-Like	1	1	9.3	13
DE Redesigned	65.3	64	75.7	106
TAA-Eligible	0	0	0.7	1
TAA + DE Redesigned	0	0	2.9	4
Unknown	33.7	33	11.4	16
Total	100.0	98	100.0	140

## **SUMMARY OF LESSONS LEARNED AND INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES**

*Faculty and staff development.* CNCC puts much effort into continuous training for its faculty. Most of the faculty members involved in redesigning the curriculum also teach the material and serve as mentors to the adjunct faculty. Even DE adjunct faculty are trained by a faculty mentor or paid to attend training to learn about the curriculum changes and implementation.

*Benefit of TAACCCT funding.* In the past few years, CNCC faculty and staff observed that increasing numbers of students did not successfully progress through their DE requirements, preventing them from completing their degrees. As a result, even prior to 2012 and the COETC grant award, CNCC had begun to redesign some of its DE courses to better serve students and improve retention and completion rates in DE English, reading, and math courses. Funding from the COETC grant has contributed to these efforts, especially in providing funds to pay faculty to work on curriculum redesign during summer and winter breaks.

## SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES

*Advising confusion.* As the college's transition to the new combined structure for DE English and reading, there has been some confusion about where to place a student who has very different Accuplacer scores for English and reading. The college is working to gain greater clarity around such placement decisions.

*STEM vs. non-STEM advising.* As CNCC transitions to implement the State DE Task Force redesign recommendation, the college recognizes the challenge students face in choosing which math pathway to enroll in, algebra (STEM) or quantitative literacy (non-STEM). This choice needs to be informed by a clear understanding of the difference between an Associate of Arts and an Associate of Science degree and the academic requirements for each. Faculty and staff have seen a surge in students choosing to follow the STEM pathway, and the college is concerned about what this change means. Does it reflect clarity on the students' part about their educational and career goals, or confusion about what each pathway represents? CNCC is now focused on training advisers to help students make these choices. The college is also considering how best to present the options at the mandatory freshman orientation and how to help students make the best choice given their interests and capacities.

*Difficulty with technology.* There is a general expectation at CNCC, as in many other colleges, that traditional students coming into college have a strong understanding of how to use technology to support their education. CNCC faculty members have been surprised by the difficulty many students have in accessing the technological knowledge needed to succeed in their college classes. As one faculty interviewee told us:

*Most of our students, whether they're traditional or nontraditional, they know how to text and they know how to search the Internet. But you ask them to link in to WebEx, or you ask them to put together a PowerPoint presentation for a class, or you ask them to type up a research paper using Word and include some XL files or upload or download, they're lost. And so until we get past this huge misconception that everybody knows how to use a computer and we're technologically savvy, until we get past that, we're going to have issues in education and barriers.*

CNCC is considering different ways of dealing with this issue. In previous years, the college has offered a computer applications class that taught students the software programs they needed to complete their coursework. Another method was a session to teach students about Desire2Learn, CNCC's online course management system, offered at the mandatory orientation. Faculty are considering additional strategies to help students develop computer literacy and bridge the technology gap before students fall behind.

*Internet Access.* Internet service is unavailable or very unreliable in many parts of CNCC's services area. (During the site visit, there was no consistent Internet service in the Craig hotel used by Rutgers.) In addition, to unreliable service in the Rangely area for off campus students,

especially those who are new to the area, there is a 3 year waiting list for internet through the local phone company. If a student moves to another home in Rangely area the internet service does not move with them. Verizon and other internet services in this area tend to be expensive.

As a result, faculty members and staff told the Rutgers team, students are not always able to work on assignments at home; they must be on campus, in either Craig or Rangely, to complete homework. This is an added burden for some students. The absence of reliable Internet service also limits the opportunity for students to enroll in online and hybrid courses. Thus, even when energy colleges within the COETC consortium have fully developed hybrid and online programs, students in this part of Colorado may not be able to take advantage of them. It is unclear what can be done about improving Internet service to this area.

*Coordinator of Counseling Services and Career Planning.* The Rutgers team has been impressed by the Coordinator's ability to balance her many hats. However, it has not always been clear to what degree her work has changed under the TAA grant. Her role as the principal counselor on campus puts her in the center of advising and student services—duties that overlap substantially with the TAA career coach position. In this context, it is unclear whether her impact as a coach can be separated from what she has done and continues to do under the aegis of her other roles.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CNCC**

- While the distance between the two primary campuses, Rangely and Craig, is a real challenge, CNCC should expand its relationship with the Craig WFC, as well as with other regional WFCs, in order to strengthen the connection between skill development and employment opportunities in these communities. The success of the college's collaborative work with the Rangely WFC, including resume development seminars, career readiness certificates, and career fairs, can be used as a model in approaching other WFCs.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSORTIUM COLLEGES**

- CNCC is invested in preparing faculty and staff to successfully implement changes in DE and effectively serve the needs of its students. Faculty and staff members are working hard to make the transition as seamless as possible for students. Attention to faculty and staff development and training should be a priority across all the colleges as they move towards full implementation of the Task Force's DE redesign by Fall 2014.