



Changes on the Ground:
Site Visit Report of the Third Year
of Developmental Education Reform
in the Florida College System

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Executive Summary

We the researchers at the Center for Postsecondary Success (CPS) at Florida State University have been conducting a longitudinal study of how Florida College System (FCS) institutions have implemented developmental education reform (SB 1720) on their campuses. As a part of this research effort, we conducted site visits to nine FCS institutions from November 2016 to April 2017 to study how SB 1720 was implemented on the ground. Here we present findings from our analysis of focus group interviews conducted at these nine FCS institutions with administrators, faculty members, advisors, and students. In total, we conducted 29 semi-structured focus groups and 8 individual interviews lasting from 35 minutes to 103 minutes. Focus groups on average involved between 2 and 10 individuals. In total, we spoke with 44 administrators, 61 faculty members, 40 academic advisors, and 91 students, resulting in data from 236 research participants.

Our student focus groups were diverse both in terms of age and racial and ethnic background. Of the 91 students who participated in our interviews and focus groups, 60% identified as female and 40% as male. Student participants' racial and ethnic background were as follows: 32% of students identified as Black or African American, 29% identified as White, non-Hispanic or Latina/o, and 25% identified as Hispanic or Latina/o. Of the participants, 19% spoke English as a second language. A total of 68% of the students were 21 years old or younger, and 66% of students graduated high school after 2013, when developmental education (DE) was restructured by Senate Bill 1720. Of the students in our sample, 67% reported taking a college placement test and 25% were enrolled in DE courses, despite having the option to exempt the courses. When asked, 68% of students indicated plans to transfer to a 4-year college or university.

Our findings in this report identify six themes related to: 1) institutional coordination and collaboration efforts, 2) the financial impact of SB 1720, 3) faculty and advisor perspectives on college student readiness, 4) student perspectives on the advising process, 5) student perspectives on the curriculum and instructional staff, and 6) student identities and academic success under SB 1720.

1. Many campus personnel reported that an unexpected positive outcome of the legislation had been improved collaboration and coordination across campus. However, collaboration challenges remained on many campuses with early alert systems, coordination between different campus stakeholders particularly faculty and advisors, and data interpretation and sharing.

2. The legislation impacted students, institutions, and potentially the state of Florida financially. Focus group participants reported that some students had reached their aggregate federal financial aid limit, due in part, to enrolling in DE coursework, while others described negative financial consequences for students from the excess credit accumulation surcharges and out-of-state tuition fees for their third attempt to pass gateway classes. Some administrators reported a loss of tuition revenue from lower Full Time Equivalents (FTEs) and feared performance funding repercussions due to changing student success patterns at their institutions. Participants feared the economic impact for Florida of students failing to complete credentials in state colleges.
3. Faculty reported many more underprepared students were enrolled in gateway courses and feared students were missing the college readiness skills that had previously been taught in DE classes. Some faculty reported maintaining rigor in their gateway courses with the influx of underprepared students while others adjusted courses expectations for these students.
4. Students considered effective advising crucial to their success in college. Students reported that specialized advisors were particularly helpful in their course enrollment decisions but also admitted engaging in self-advising. Problems with advising tended to occur around unnecessary coursework and confusion about transfer requirements.
5. Students had mixed feelings about whether DE coursework laid a strong foundation for later coursework or was a “waste of time.” Similarly, some students reported that enrolling in gateway courses had been a mistake while others were pleased with their choice to enroll in these courses rather than DE classes. Students characterized effective faculty as accessible, supportive, accommodating, and energetic. Ineffective faculty were described as rigid, unsupportive, and indifferent to student needs.
6. Throughout our visits to FCS institutions we heard stories of students’ noteworthy resilience and determination. We provide a glimpse into the lives of economically disadvantaged students, first-generation students, immigrant and English language learners, veterans, and returning adult students. These populations encounter threats to their academic success at FCS institutions associated with their identities, including financial concerns, lack of knowledge about college, academic under-preparedness, and multiple and competing priorities.

The findings in this statewide report were based on focus groups with administrators, faculty members, advisors, support staff, and students during our visits to nine FCS institutions. In addition, the CPS team will continue to analyze student data to examine student outcomes over time, document the changes in institutional programs and practices, and study the interrelations among state policy change, institutional transformation, and student success in postsecondary education.

Introduction

Researchers at the CPS have been conducting a longitudinal study of how Florida College System (FCS) institutions have implemented developmental education reform (SB 1720) on their campuses. As a part of this research effort, CPS researchers conducted site visits to nine FCS institutions from November 2016 to April 2017. In this statewide report, we consider administrative, faculty, advisor, support staff, and student perspectives on broad trends which have taken place across the FCS since SB 1720 was enacted. We begin this report by presenting perceptions of the legislation we encountered across the state of Florida in 2016-2017 by stakeholders at nine institutions.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE LEGISLATION

Focus group data from our first and second years of data collection revealed some unfavorable perceptions of SB 1720. Now, in year three of implementation, some participants' views have remained the same and others have shifted. One faculty member whose perspective was unwavering, stated, "My feeling has not changed at all about Senate Bill 1720." An administrator felt, "That it was going to be against the students, and like, now...I was right. The students, you know, they are having big problems in English and math."

A faculty member at a third institution said the same:

... Of all the things that've happened in the last few years, many of them are not happy. You know, we weren't happy in the beginning, and in many ways we're still not happy. We don't see the program working well for the students.

Another administrator, however, expressed a contrasting view. His perspective had shifted over time, "My first reaction was, this is going to be an

unmitigated disaster. My attitude has changed. It's definitely been tempered." Feelings about the legislation among some of our participants had changed for a variety of reasons. Some felt DE had improved when students freely chose to enroll in the classes, others believed the legislation had succeeded in accelerating the course sequence, still others were impressed by the innovative new curricula that faculty had developed. Even those with tempered views tended to offer mixed reactions to the legislation in its third year of implementation.

A faculty member explained why she thought students actively choosing to take DE had improved her courses:

I moved from panic and confusion and chagrin to some degree of comfort in it [the legislation]. But then I teach prep. So my courses have changed, and my student specialty was only stronger. Because most of my students now are older students, they're more mature students, or they're students who've actually chosen to take my class.

Another faculty member believed the legislation had decreased time-to-degree. She also commented that alternate math pathways (which were increasingly adopted after the legislation but were not mandated) had actually improved outcomes for students when they had been properly advised to take these courses:

So I'm actually – I'm thinking people are getting out sooner. I just think that they need the right advising and they need to be directed to these alternative classes if they're not going to get through the algebras, and some of them just – they're not.

A faculty member at another institution disagreed that time-to-degree had decreased after SB 1720, but did point to inventive new curriculum that had been created in response to the legislation:

... our, I guess, overall reaction to the bill, a couple of things that I wanted to say in the beginning was... it doesn't really help them get through quicker and it's still costing them a lot, but in other factors, like in terms of being more creative and innovative with our curriculum, I think that was a positive that came out of the bill.

Like the previous faculty member, an administrator explained that the curriculum had been a successful response to the legislation yet course placement for students was still problematic:

It's heartening to see that due to the approaches that we've instituted...that we're maintaining the level of success and both in the gateway course, the first course past dev ed and then subsequent courses. I still think, though, that a lot of students are not really in the right position based upon Senate Bill 1720. I think we're doing them a disservice by not really giving them ... We're not really vetting them carefully enough in terms of placement based upon the policies of this rule. I think they're not being best served.

Overall, perceptions of the legislation were sometimes tempered, but had not changed drastically across Florida state colleges from previous years of our study. Many campus personnel still held negative views of the legislation, were concerned about the needs of students, and continued to ponder legislators' rationale for the legislation. Individuals who later developed more positive views of the legislation were initially apprehensive but now had seen some positive changes occur at their institutions.

This report is organized into eight sections. In section one, we present a literature review of prominent themes identified in our data. Next, in section two, we present the research design used to collect and analyze our data. In section three, we highlight data on coordination and collaboration efforts, an important byproduct of the legislation at each of the nine institutions we visited. In section four, we consider findings on the financial challenges associated with SB 1720 for students, institutions, and the state of Florida as a whole. In section five, we examine faculty and advisor perspectives on college student readiness and socialization to college. In section six, we present student perceptions of the advising process. In section seven, we discuss student perspectives on the DE and gateway curriculum as well as student perceptions of faculty. In section eight, we consider challenges associated with several student populations including economically disadvantaged, first-generation, immigrant and English language learners, veterans, and returning adult student and how these identities may require specific support services for these students to succeed in state college. We conclude with information about the future work of the CPS.

Section One: Literature Review

Students become connected to an institution by developing relationships with individuals in that institution, whether with campus personnel or peers. A lack of meaningful relationships on campus can produce social isolation and a feeling of incongruence between the student and the institution, decreasing a student's chances for success (Deil-Amen, 2011; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Karp, Hughes, & O'Gara, 2008; Tinto, 1993; Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, & Thomas, 1999). A number of studies have established that students who feel related to campus personnel or "institutional agents" (Stanton-Salazaar, 2001) are more likely to succeed academically than those who lack such social and academic integration (Astin, 1996; Cox et al., 2012; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The literature on student relatedness with faculty and advisors provides additional context regarding the meaningful interactions between students and campus personnel, particularly the interactions described in our site visits. We first explore the literature on student relationships with faculty, relationships with advisors, and finally ways that campus personnel promote meaningful social and academic integration on campus.

Student Relationships with Faculty

There are a number of student outcomes specifically linked to students' relatedness with faculty including increased persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), improved learning (Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004), and higher GPAs (Anaya & Cole, 2001; Guiffrida, Lynch, Wall, & Abel, 2013). Researchers have posited that students' feelings of relatedness with faculty are important to academic success because they encourage students to pursue educationally valuable activities (Cox et al., 2012; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Pascarella &

Terenzini, 2005). Relatedness with faculty is especially salient in community colleges because faculty may be the most frequent point of contact with an institution as students negotiate the competing demands of family, work, and school (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015; Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon 2004; Deil-Amen, 2011).

Student Relationships with Advisors

While community college students typically spend less total time with academic advisors than with faculty, the relationship is nonetheless an important one because advisors may constitute students' first experience with campus personnel at new student orientation (Bailey et al., 2015). Advisor-student relationships can also potentially be the most long-lasting because students may see the same advisor from initial orientation through coursework to graduation. A number of studies have shown that high quality academic advising is associated with higher persistence and graduation rates (Elliot & Healy, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Seidman, 1991). However, Cohen, Brawer, and Kisker (2014) have stated that "academic counselors face unremitting conflict between guiding students into the programs most consonant with their abilities and allowing them to reach for their own preferred goals" (p. 219).

Two predominant models of the academic advising relationship that reflect this conflict have been described as the prescriptive model and the developmental model (Crookston, 1972). In prescriptive advising, interactions between advisors and students are controlled by the advisor, who has the authority of an expert. By contrast, in

developmental advising advisors and students share control and students are granted the autonomy to make their own educational decisions during advising sessions as part of a larger developmental process (Bailey et al., 2015).

Cuseo (1989) asserts, “effective advising can exert appreciable impact on student retention through its salutary influence on students’ educational and career planning and decision making” (p. 5). More than one study draws positive correlations between retention and advising but as a component of a group of interventions and support services such as first-year experience, student contracts, and group support sessions (Ableman & Molina, 2001; Kirk-Kuwaye & Nishida, 2001). Kuh (2008) and Young, Jones, Burt, Dixon, and Hawthorne (2013) note that advising is linked to factors associated with increased retention rates including engagement in high impact activities, student self-concept, and study skills.

Institutional Integration for Student Success

In order to create conditions conducive to academic and social integration, institutions have undertaken a number of initiatives that provide students with structured opportunities to build meaningful relationships on campus. Indeed, students have reported that they are more likely to use campus resources when they have learned about those resources through social relationships rather than through printed or online information (Karp, Hughes, & O’Gara, 2008). These practices may be focused on improving relationships between students and campus personnel or between supportive peers and students. Some of the practices that foster academic and social integration include new student orientation, student success courses, learning communities, mentoring programs, student activities,

and peer tutoring (Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Cox et al., 2012; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Social integration is not only important for students; faculty, staff, and administrators benefit as well. When there is a void, it is acutely felt. For instance, faculty members desire to feel connected to their institution and to one another. Unfortunately, the nature of community college campuses lead faculty members to feel particularly isolated: “Most instructors speak of their lives and work as individual, isolated, lonely” (Grubb, 1999, p. 49). Not surprisingly, isolation is counterproductive to student success (Grubb, 1999). In contrast, when collaboration and integration between faculty and student services exists, academic success is greater (Jenkins, 2007).

To achieve integration, administrators, faculty, and advisors rely on “information networks” (Karp, Hughes, & O’Gara, 2008). These exist within an institution to improve practice by providing a coordinated, intentional institutional effort to improve student success. Administrators can be intentional in their policies by grounding organizational programs in pertinent theory (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2011) and by sharing institution-specific data with those who need it to improve practice (Kowalsky & Lasley, 2010). Above all, institutions need to create organizational structures favorable to increasing communication and collaboration among all relevant stakeholders (Kezar, 2006).

Section Two: Research Design

Researchers at the Center for Postsecondary Success have been conducting site visits to FCS institutions for three years, starting in 2014. In this section, we described the data collection and analysis methods for the study on which this report is based.

DATA COLLECTION

Email invitations were sent to all FCS institutions requesting participation in the site visit component of the larger study on DE implementation and evaluation in FCS institutions. Nine institutions accepted our invitation. Five of the nine institutions were first time site visits, while we previously visited four of the institutions. Two-day site visits to the institutions were completed in fall 2016 and spring 2017. At least two CPS researchers visited each institution. Institutions assisted CPS researchers with setting up logistics of the visit, including soliciting potential focus group participants, as well as securing on-campus space for the focus group sessions. Data sources included field observations, institutional documents collected during site visits, and transcripts from focus groups with relevant stakeholders at the institutions.

Field Observations

CPS researchers generated field notes, identifying salient, interesting, or illuminating observations from each visit. Many of the field notes focused on observations of DE courses, gateway math and English courses, and advising sessions.

Institutional Documents

In phase one of the project (2014-2015), CPS researchers collected and analyzed Implementation Plans from all 28 FCS institutions. The plans from the

nine FCS institutions we visited were used to support the development of the focus group interview protocols and the coding framework used for data analysis in the first and subsequent years. Starting in year two (2015-2016), researchers reviewed the Developmental Education Accountability Report compiled by the Division of Florida Colleges. Each FCS institution submitted an updated DE reform plan, along with other noteworthy actions taken related to DE. In the second and current phases (2016-2017) of the project, this report and institutional documents such as course syllabi, advising flowcharts, and DE brochures were used to provide background information for the focus group and field observation data.

Focus Groups

In the current phase of data collection, we conducted 29 semi-structured focus groups and 8 individual interviews lasting from 35 minutes to 103 minutes. Focus groups on average involved between 2 and 10 individuals. In total, we spoke with 44 administrators, 61 faculty members, 40 academic advisors, and 91 students, resulting in data from 236 research participants. All interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants.

Our student focus groups were diverse both in terms of age and racial and ethnic background. Of the 91 students who participated in our interviews and focus groups, 60% identified as female and 40% as male. Student participants' racial and ethnic background were as follows: 32% of students identified as Black or African American, 29% identified as White, non-Hispanic or Latina/o, and 25% identified as Hispanic or Latina/o. Of the participants, 19% spoke English

as a second language. A total of 68% of the students were 21 years old or younger. Of the students, 66% graduated after 2013, when developmental education (DE) was restructured by Senate Bill 1720. A total of 67% of students reported taking a college placement test and 25% of students were enrolled in DE courses, despite having the option to exempt the courses. When asked, 68% of students indicated plans to transfer to a 4-year college or university.

The interview protocols for each of the stakeholder groups were designed to identify the considerations underlying institutions' choices for the new placement, advising, and DE options. Each of the four interview protocols (i.e., administrator, faculty, advisor and support staff, and student) began with a "grand tour" question intended to identify broad changes in institutional practice after the passage of SB 1720. The administrative protocol, for instance, began with the following question, "Overall, how would you describe your college's approach to redesigning your developmental education program?" Likewise, the faculty and advisor/support staff protocols began with grand tour questions eliciting an overview of curricular changes, changes to the advising process, and changes to academic support functions. The student protocol focused broadly on students' educational experiences at their respective institutions as well as their perceptions of changes in several areas including curriculum, advising, and support services. From these opening questions, follow-up questions were then asked for participants to elaborate on their perspectives about implementation of the legislation. Each focus group concluded with the following question, "Is there anything we didn't ask about developmental education reform and your experience at this institution that would be important to know?"

DATA ANALYSIS

A digital recording of each focus group was used to generate a verbatim transcript. Transcripts were then imported into qualitative data analysis software, NVivo 10, for coding and analysis. To establish analyst triangulation (Patton, 2015), multiple analysts (five researchers) coded the data. The entire coding team met weekly to share findings and discuss issues arising from data analysis.

We used pattern coding of the focus group transcripts to identify central ideas and properties in the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). We employed a four-phase approach to guide data coding and analysis. In the first phase, we read through the field notes, institutional documents, focus group data, and memos (described below) to gain a better understanding of institutional processes and participant perspectives at each institution.

Coding in phase two involved a subset of data files across participant types. During this process, the coding team of five researchers engaged in a reliability-building process. During the initial phase of open coding, we began with the coding framework from year two that included 208 codes. Each researcher coded four transcripts individually. We then ran the Cohen's Kappa coefficient function in NVivo 10 on the selected transcripts to determine the degree of similarity in coding styles between researchers. Our aggregate coefficient was 0.549, indicating "fair to good agreement" according to the guidelines set by the software company that makes NVivo, QRS International. This process also allowed us to identify disputed codes so that we could redefine them and increase our reliability moving forward. In addition to establishing inter-coder reliability, we revised our year two coding framework

by identifying new themes or removed themes that were no longer relevant for year three data. After modifying the coding framework from year two and adding, merging, or deleting codes, we had a total of 259 codes for the current year of coding. After we achieved inter-coder reliability, members of the team used the revised framework to code the remaining files in phase three, and to re-code and analyze the data coded during reliability-building.

Researchers also wrote analytic memos throughout the data collection and analysis processes. Written memos in this project were used to identify emergent themes in the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). These themes were used to create codes, including broad codes like *students* and more detailed codes like *student perceptions of faculty and staff*.

In the fourth phase of data analysis, we synthesized the policy implementation processes, student experiences, and participant perspectives at each of the nine institutions.

Trustworthiness was established through data source triangulation (field notes, institutional documents, and focus groups), and peer debriefing with two researchers who acted as “devil’s advocates” in questioning the group’s interpretations (Patton, 2015). Member-checking of the institutional synopses is currently being conducted with administrators from each of the nine state colleges we visited.

Section Three: Institutional Coordination and Collaboration Efforts

Some colleges described having a highly collaborative environment before SB 1720 and some developed it through the process of implementation. For those who lacked collaborative environments, improved campus-wide collaboration and coordination were some of the most positive unintended consequences of the legislation. One administrator stated:

One of the greatest things that have come out of this [SB 1720] is collaboration. We were able to work together, college-wide, as mentioned, but also within the academic success centers, we were able to make sure that we were all aware of what services are offered on each campus.

An administrator at another college agreed, “I think one of the good consequences is... collaboration among the whole campus... Academics works with student services, which works with access, which works with testing... The collaboration on the campuses has been a good positive consequence of this.” An administrator at a third institution drove this point home by highlighting the successes of implementation, despite an initial lack of buy-in for implementation. He explained:

That’s the part I was happiest with, seeing that the college in that many different departments could come together and make something this vast

happen relatively pain-free. Was there some angst over having to do it in the first place? Yeah, a little bit. But once we got through our first meeting of that taskforce, that seemed to be the end of it and then it was, 'Let's get to work.'

Regardless of when or how collaboration and coordination developed, both were identified by all institutions as integral to carrying out the legislation successfully. Administrators, in particular, had a lot to say on this topic. One acknowledged that employees at all levels were involved with carrying out the mandates of SB 1720:

We're very, very fortunate to be in a school where it [implementation] was collaborative, and you were allowed to be honest and open, you know, and – and that's what helped to build the plan that, you know, Tallahassee [Division of Florida Colleges] said was really quite outstanding. So I think it was a collaborative effort from varying levels of the school.

An administrator at another college described a similar scenario, whereby personnel from all of campus were engaged in reform efforts:

We did a tremendous amount of work from the legislation. We basically, honestly, set aside a lot of our institutional priorities for four months to build all this. And it was extremely collaborative. We had an oversight group with some of us or our colleagues that were in these roles prior were part of that team. But it did engage the entire college family.

Focus group participants reported that over the past three years, collaboration and coordination occurred in meetings, brainstorming sessions, and trainings.

To this point, one administrator described a series of meetings that took place in order to accomplish some of the "heavy lifting" required by the bill:

I'd say the first phase, now once we worked through the five stages of grief... that was the busiest time. In other words, that was where we had to have a lot of DE taskforce meetings, and we had a lot of issues we had to sort through. We had a report to send to the state with the options we were choosing. That took a lot of heavy lifting. So we met with each other, we saw each other a great deal. That was phase one. Now in what I would call the second and maybe entering into the third phase, everyone is assessing how it's going. So it's back to business as usual to some extent.

Successful collaboration required involvement by many individuals and departments on FCS campuses. The most common form of collaboration and coordination was between faculty and advisors. For instance, one faculty member reported that they:

...work in collaboration with advising, where at their orientation or advising registration sessions they were able to inform the students of what to expect in [ENC] 1101. They gave them writing samples and a few more things... It was a way to help those students see what to expect in these courses and then perhaps they could look at taking one of our remedial courses instead.

At another state college, a faculty member highlighted their collaboration with advising to get students signed up for appropriate coursework. He said, "We added a modularized course... We worked with advising to try to get the students into the modularized class if they needed that full 16-weeks."

Other examples of collaboration involved academic support services, student disability services, and information technology. For example, one advisor applauded her college's sense of collaboration, especially around support services: "I think one of the... best things about this college is that... support services are recognized... And advising and support work together. We try to train together. We know, you know, we are on the same page with each other." Another pointed out that collaboration exists between advising and student disability services: "We work with the SDS department closely to schedule one-on-one appointments for students with disabilities." Another administrator also reflected on the successful transition that was required of the information technology staff:

I think we responded tremendously to our student record system with the new program, because our new record system had to be coded so that when the students came in to meet with an advisor, we would know whether they were qualified to be exempt or non-exempt... I mean the fact that we can work with our MIS department and make that change into the system and create, um, an online form that the students can complete I think is – is extremely important.

While many of these observations proved optimistic, our data also highlighted negative perceptions of SB 1720. Because of the rapid timetable and exhaustive nature of the reform, there arose a number of challenges that highlighted shortcomings in communication.

COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES: EARLY ALERT SYSTEMS

One place where this was particularly evident was in early alert practices. Individuals at most of the colleges described a system that allowed faculty and staff to communicate about students who face academic or personal trouble and need additional support. Concerned individuals create alerts that are then pushed to their colleagues in other, relevant departments. With more underprepared students in college-level courses post-SB 1720, challenges were more common, and supports more necessary than ever. Our data show, however, that communication through early alert programs occurred with varying levels of success.

One major problem was participation. At one institution, an advisor claimed that "the faculty don't all use it." At another college, an advisor noted that outcomes were dependent on which faculty were participating. The "good faculty" engage in early alert processes, with or without a mandated, college-sponsored system, while other faculty members did not:

It was a mixed bag as far as which faculty would really embrace doing that. The good faculty do their own system, early alerts, whether they call it that or not. They give early and consistent feedback, which, as you know, is needed for successful instruction.

When early alert systems did get used, there was some confusion as to who received the information and when. At one college, an advisor pointed at that "advising doesn't get that early alert." Instead, the message goes to the registrar's office, who then contacts students via "snail mail." Reflecting on this

process, the advisor states, “We want to change that.” At another college, an advisor stated, “right now we’re getting early alert... but it’s late... I mean, it should be in the first two or three weeks, not coming mid-February... Because of the system, the way it’s set up, we’re not reaching students in time.”

Faculty and staff also worried about the effectiveness of current early alert models. One advisor described the situation in this way:

I have something to say about early alert. I don’t think sometimes we can help them [students] as we wanted... Sometimes it says “student is always late,” and we can coach them for that. But when it says, “Low test scores,” how can we assist the student if it’s not through the professor? The professor should be the one telling the student, “Okay, you need to see me,” because you as professor are telling me help the student? I don’t teach the class. I don’t know exactly what’s going on with the students.

Advisors tended to believe that faculty could do more to support student success, since academic content is closer to their area of expertise. Faculty, however, felt as if they already had too much work. This disconnect was likely a break-down of communication and unclear role definitions.

In light of these critiques, it is no surprise that one advisor candidly stated that early alert systems really only “look good on paper. They look good when you’re writing grant proposals, that sort of thing.” Moving forward, perhaps there are ways of revising the early alert system(s) to improve communication, collaboration, and ultimately, student outcomes. Of course, while many were critical of early alert, this

perspective was not universal. There were some who saw value in the process. Indeed, one advisor described the program as “a great concept in terms of collaboration.”

COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES: INFORMATION ACCURACY AND FLOW

Another challenge with communication was the flow of information through information networks. Without placement test scores, advisors relied heavily on the information that they received for each student. However, several noted problems with the accuracy and flow of information, especially related to exempt and non-exempt sorting. While SB 1720 exempts students who spent four years in a Florida high school, advisors believed many students were incorrectly assigned this status. One advisor explained:

I think it’s a misunderstanding with the bill because it says there that the students who enter ninth grade [achieve exempt status] ... We assume that they were nine, ten, eleven, twelve. But when they come here we just check that, “Oh, they come here from high school? Then they’re set.” But we don’t go back and actually check if they started in ninth grade... We don’t have time to check that... and they’re sometimes misadvised.

This was not an isolated opinion. In the words of another advisor, “As long as they graduated from high school, I wouldn’t check anything else because we don’t have time.” One advisor pointed to admissions as the place where information problems began: “It’s so messy. It’s – everything starts in admissions.” Another speculated the cause as being rooted in the information technology system: “I think what they do is when they put it in the system, they put the high school code in. The system automatically exempts them.”

To this point, an advisor recommended that policies and procedures be reviewed: “We... should make it clear, make a procedure so everybody actually follows what it’s supposed to be, ‘cause it’s not fair. If one student is going through this and the other one is not... they feel unfairness. ‘Why me and not my friend?’” An advisor at another college made a similar request – that important information be clarified and written down in formalized policies:

We need more consistency in the communication across – college-wide, because if everyone gets the same information college-wide, I think we’re gonna do better. But it’s just that... everything is verbal, and we need to have it in writing, because then...it would be more clear.

While the broad trend across the FCS was for increased collaboration and coordination in state colleges after SB 1720, focus group participants highlighted a few instances when efforts to coordinate campus personnel had been unsuccessful.

INEFFECTIVE COLLABORATION AND COORDINATION

Some institutions reported being much more collaborative than others. For example, advisors at one such college expressed the view that they were expected to fix many institutional problems that felt intractable to them. Instead, they felt that a shared institutional commitment to coordinate across divisions could improve processes campus-wide.

An advisor explained:

I think, basically, what our observation on the management side is, is all I can say is that whether it’s dev ed, whether it’s academic success, whether it’s retention, advising is not gonna be the department that fixes this. It has to be everybody

doing the things that need to get done from the faculty to the chairs to advising to working together to look at the need and then do what needs to get done whether that’s add more adjuncts to fill these dev ed classes to – I mean it’s just a lack of – the bridge is not meeting all the way through.

Faculty at the same institution agreed with advisors about the need for greater coordination across divisions, particularly between faculty and advisors. Specifically, they believed there was confusion across the institution about the work conducted in different areas.

Students also noted that there appeared to be a misalignment between the content of communication and what was happening on the ground. A student told us:

A lot of times I would say that the college itself advertises things about student life. Oh, if you want to know about where to pick up your regalia, come to student life. I mean we always say those things, but sometimes they don’t send us messages about what we should know and what’s going on. Like I had no idea about certain things that students come over here to ask, and we don’t have available. Like I said, to get your regalia, go to student life. It’s actually at the bookstore, you see?

In short, while collaboration and coordination has increased overall post-SB 1720, there are still many opportunities for improved coordination and collaboration moving forward.

NEED FOR INCREASED DATA SHARING AND INTERPRETATION

Often, administrators described wearing hats as administrators and faculty members (often adjunct faculty). As a result, they witnessed first-hand the needs of students in the classroom, and processes that needed to change administratively. One change that happened as a result of SB 1720 was that administrators are now relying heavily on institutional data (e.g., assessment and evaluation) to make informed decisions. For example, since enrollment in DE classes began to decrease, some administrators have been using data to assess what “has and has not been working” institutionally. One administrator stated:

When the 1720 senate bill came around what happened is enrollment for us started to dip... We started relying on... data to show us what was working and what wasn't working... With this data, we reached out to other departments to consult with them about 'Okay now, we no longer have the developmental options, so to speak but we know we still have developmental students. What can we do?' So we reached out and we literally went from... program to program to program and said 'Okay, what do you need from us to get your students prepared? What do you need from us?'

Some administrators were committed to using data to make the necessary changes to comply with SB 1720. In doing so, taskforces were formed to help think about how to interpret and use the data in moving forward with implementation. One administrator stated:

On the curricular side, we have a developmental education taskforce meeting set for November 29th, and [name of administrator] asked me to reconvene a dev ed taskforce group which had been established a couple of years ago for the

implementation of dev ed reform. She wanted that taskforce reestablished to look at this data in more detail. And so I'll be presenting it to those folks, and we'll be brainstorming ideas....

Other administrators felt that the data they received were not explained well or “contextualized.” In essence, administrators advocated for campus-wide conversations that led to deeper *interpretations* of the data available to them (i.e., answering the why questions behind the trends in the data). One administrator stated:

... I think that that data, those numbers, those quantify success numbers, especially I'm thinking of the dev ed accountability report that when we're looking across our colleges there needs to be better contextualization. There needs to be better explanation of what these numbers might suggest, right...

Many individuals, particularly faculty and staff, felt that in addition to better data interpretation, data *sharing* could improve across the FCS. For example, an advisor stated:

There is currently that situation where nobody really – unless you're in a certain level have access to the data. And there is something to be said about empowering your staff to know the data and so that we can have a chance to analyze and interpret it for what we need to work on. And it would be super helpful if we had access to the data.

Faculty agreed with advisors on this point. Faculty reported the need to receive essential data, including student outcome data as well as information regarding other state colleges. They also desired more information about decision-making processes and their institutional impacts.

THE INFLUENCE OF INSTITUTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS ON COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION

Administrators at two different colleges noted that the size of their institution made implementation of SB 1720 particularly challenging. They acknowledged that strong communication is all the more important to making real and lasting change. In the words of one administrator:

We're a very large institution and it takes a really long time for information to disseminate, for opinions to come back. On the other hand, we're in a state that makes a number of regulations and laws about higher education that often require significant changes and often very quickly, and trying to resolve those. For things to really thrive, I think what's ideal is for everyone to feel that they've been heard and they have a voice and it's been discussed and everyone has maybe not come to consensus, but has sort of put their voice in and we've come to a resolution. On the other hand, we often, this had happened with DE..., had to make big changes very quickly and we're not able to wait. I think that's just a structural challenge that our institution faces, and I don't really know how to address that, but I think that I've seen that play out a few times.

An administrator at another large state college echoed these sentiments:

Size... When you try to do it [implementation] in a big, big college like we are, and we're so spread out inside of different counties and all that, it's kind of hard. So that's why the importance of that initial communication channel that were created at the beginning with all the groups that got together college-wide, trying to come up with solutions to some of that.

Furthermore, how departments were organized mattered, regardless of size. At one college, an administrator spoke about how developmental education courses had been reabsorbed by their respective academic departments. Developmental English is now a part of the English department, and developmental math, the Mathematics department. She said, "We're one department and I think that really helps the communication efforts." In both of these examples, regarding size and organization, institutional characteristics impacted the perceived success of collaboration and coordination efforts.

Section Four: The Financial Implications of SB 1720

From the perspective of our focus group participants, SB 1720 has had profound financial implications for students, for institutions, and potentially for the future economy of the state of Florida. In this section, we first examine the impact of SB 1720 on students' personal finances, then highlight institutions' financial concerns, and finally consider participants' perceptions of the broader statewide impact of SB 1720.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE FINANCIAL IMPACT OF SB 1720 ON STUDENTS

The financial impacts of SB 1720 on students must be understood in the context of the student populations who attend the state colleges in Florida. Given the socioeconomic status of many FCS students, focus group participants universally agreed that financial aid is of paramount importance to students' ability to pursue higher education, particularly for economically disadvantaged students.

Importance of Financial Aid for Students & Families

Across the board, our focus group participants indicated that economically disadvantaged FCS students were particularly vulnerable to the loss of financial aid. An advisor observed, "And I have students in my campus that need their financial aid... That's the only reason they're here."

Several students explained that financial aid provided more than just money to cover their educational expenses. Oftentimes, students described also using financial aid to support their extended families. One student, for instance, explained how he would spend any extra money left in the month:

Like I might pay my bills, and probably have like \$50 or \$100 left, and that's – mind you, that's for like the month. But I'm the type, I'll send that back home if I heard my dad like he's short on it himself or something.

Another student described his dilemma whether to move away from home and pay rent or to continue to support his mother's household:

Student: I stayed in the house to save money, but yet even though I don't have to pay rent and stuff, her financial burdens become mine.... And I was like, I, I know I'm grown now, so you don't have to let me stay here. Like when I'm trying to save money... And just something came up. "I'm a little short. Can you help me? Can you help me? Can you help me?"

Moderator: So you might as well pay rent.

Student: Yeah, I might as well go somewhere and pay rent then, but then I'm worried about, okay, I've been doing all this. If I just up and leave and go start paying rent and stuff, what are you [my mom] gonna do?

In both instances, students found themselves in the role of financial caretakers for parents without reliable incomes. Therefore, loss of financial aid would have a ripple effect not just on the students but on their families' finances as well.

Implications of SB 1720 for Financial Aid Eligibility

Several trends related to financial aid emerged from our data. A number of factors related to financial aid tended to encourage or discourage students' enrollment in DE. Students' reliance on financial

aid sometimes discouraged DE enrollment, making students more reluctant to enroll in what they perceived as ‘wasted’ credits that did not help them progress towards a credential. Students’ concerns about wasting financial aid on non-credit bearing DE courses were not without reason. Federal financial aid policy limits dependent undergraduates to an aggregate loan amount of \$31,000 and independent undergraduates to an aggregate amount of \$57,500 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). An advisor described a student who spent so much financial aid on DE coursework that he had no financial aid eligibility left to pursue a bachelor’s degree:

So I have an example of a student that is one of those that had to go into dev ed, but literally has taken about two-and-a-half years to even get through the developmental education realm, you know, and that is very common. So I’ve literally been here for four-and-a-half years and he’s finally just finished his associates’ degree.... Before we were even making regulations on financial aid, I could tell you he probably has student loans – like, \$50,000 in student loan debt, you know, close to his aggregate limit. Now that we’ve just finished the AA, he doesn’t even have enough to finish a bachelor’s degree.

Another factor discouraging DE enrollment was that some DE classes were offered for more credit hours than gateway courses. Two faculty members explained why the higher credit courses dissuaded students from enrolling in DE:

Faculty 1: They don’t wanna go from four credits to six credits in math. That’s probably it [why students don’t enroll].

Faculty 2: They’d have to pay out of pocket or use financial aid.

Faculty 1: Or even in English. It’s just one more credit, you know?

Faculty 2: Yeah.

Faculty 1: But it’s paying for that one more credit.

The perception that DE classes were wasted credits worked to students’ benefit when they were able to succeed in the more rigorous college-level coursework, but worked to their detriment when they made multiple attempts to pass college-level coursework and ultimately lost financial aid eligibility. On this note, an administrator remarked, “And so I’m curious to see since the Senate Bill 1720, how many students have left these underserved schools, and how many have lost their aid within a year or two of attempting college? That’s my concern.” Likewise, an administrator at another institution explained, “Some are into their third attempt with their course work. By then, they might have lost their financial aid, so that hurts when you tell them, “You’ve got to pay on your own.” For this reason, an advisor described the language she used to counsel students about the importance of doing well in gateway courses so as to avoid financial aid repercussions:

Oftentimes I’ll have students – because we’ll talk about the academic piece but also I’ll bring in the financial aid piece – the importance of passing those classes [gateway courses], you know, “I see that you have financial aid and that’s resources that you’re using to cover the cost of your classes, but do you realize that if you’re not successful in these classes you could lose all your aid and then you would be responsible. And financial aid does cover these courses that’s in your – because they are developmental courses, financial aid will cover those courses, so you want to think about that because the decision that you make now can impact you on your next steps and moving forward.

Two other state-level financial penalties affected students making multiple attempts to pass college-level courses. First, students are charged out-of-state tuition fees on their third attempt to pass a course. An administrator explained, “So you may have those concerns about now this is my third attempt. Do I have to pay out-of-state fees? What am I gonna do?” In addition to out-of-state tuition fees, multiple attempts may result in a surcharge for excess credit accumulation. An advisor described warning students about this potential problem:

It’s not just the financial aid there, it’s the excess credit hours, so that’s normally a conversation that you can have with that student as well...

If you’re planning on transferring to the Florida public university you have to be aware too if you get in over your head in these courses and it’s not successful then that goes into that excess credit hour surcharge so it’s better to start where you need to start.

Also related to the excess credit accumulation surcharge was students’ decisions about whether to enroll in Student Life Skills (SLS) courses. For students who opt out of DE, SLS courses can provide additional instruction in college readiness skills that might otherwise be covered in DE classes. Two advisors explained how SLS was impacted by financial aid policy at their institution:

Advisor 1: Yeah, it’s optional [SLS].

Advisor 2: ... Financial aid becomes a factor, then you’re using up elective credits on that [SLS], and then if you had a program that you’re tight on that and you get up to 60 [credits], you’re done and you’re out the door and they’re not gonna pay for anything more above that 60 mark, so you get the – you got another big piece of the puzzle that I think is being included in that, too, ‘cause a lot of

them [students] would say, “That’s a waste of three of my elective credits.”

Similarly, a faculty member at another institution described both the importance of SLS to student success, as well as the financial disincentive for students to enroll in the class:

A lot of them are GED or they didn’t even go to a regular traditional high school. Their academic knowledge is so little. So we really have been pushing and pushing. Give them some kind of support and all of the research that we pulled showed that SLS is extremely effective. Our students did so much better in the next semester and passed their gen ed courses with a higher rate, but once that whole course bearing requirement that they can’t go over in credit hours, they really cut back on it.

In addition to the financial aid challenges described above, it should be noted that under SB 1720 the GI Bill no longer covers DE courses in Florida because they are classified as optional. This situation is described in greater depth in the Veterans section of this report.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF SB 1720 ON INSTITUTIONS

SB 1720 impacted institutions in a number of ways. First, at least one institution in our sample reported that there had been a loss of tuition revenue after SB 1720. An administrator explained:

Moderator: What has been the impact on campus resources? I know you mentioned earlier that credits have gone down so there’s a lot of loss of tuition.

Administrator: There was a loss of tuition, there was a loss of FTE... I think what's happened is it's probably pushed more students to the technical side of the house because they've probably taken some of the classes and gone, "Man, I can't hack this. I think what we're beginning to see is a shift away from the AA university transfer, into job training, which was another unintended outcome, or intended by the legislature. The legislature was never willing to tell us their reason for doing this.

Another administrator worried that the institution would be affected by the legislation due to lowered student outcomes on indicators measured by performance funding:

There's no financial gain for us. If there is, it's minimal... It's not like we're going to generate lots of FTE or money. We're just trying to make sure they [the students] don't fail. That's where the state of Florida then came along and did something else really interesting with performance indicators, and said, "Now, how many can you retain and how many can you complete?" You yanked the foundation right out from under us, by not allowing us to help them with developmental needs, and then hauling our feet to the fire to complete them successfully.

In addition to the potential loss of tuition revenue and performance funding, institutions had to reallocate resources to meet the needs of underprepared students enrolled in college-level coursework. An administrator at a large institution with the flexibility to shift campus resources described the change that took place after the legislation passed:

I think that it was more – in terms of human resource, it was more of restructuring the resources that we already had rather than just

spending more funds on it. So basically, we took a look at what we had already in place and we just modified the structure to fit the new models that we had, rather than just, you know, spending more.

At other institutions, administrators reported hiring additional staff including more advisors, more tutors and support staff, and more faculty with 18 graduate credits to teach college-level courses. An administrator described the increase in the support staff at her institution:

We've had to pull aside and offer special tutoring... We created a whole department in our learning resource center that was called tutoring and learning lab, so that students that were weak in any one of the three areas, the reading, the English or the math, could go over there and get assistance.

Several institutions reported that the total number of faculty decreased when adjuncts were eliminated, but staff costs increased because adjuncts were replaced with costlier full-time faculty who were credentialed to teach college-level courses. With respect to the decrease in the adjunct workforce, a faculty member explained, "We were significantly cut in numbers, but we have very few adjuncts left." An administrator at another institution described the increase in full-time faculty to teach gateway courses with higher enrollments, "We have made a conscious effort on my campus to increase the number of full-time faculty teaching gateway courses."

Due to these changes, other institutional priorities sometimes had to be cut. For instance, a faculty member explained:

The reading lab disappeared when we were cut back so much. We had a separate reading lab and they just couldn't support it...We used to have a reading tutor, which was a certified teacher with reading background in the lab at least 20 hours a week, but that went away, too.

Beyond the financial impact on FCS institutions, many focus group participants believed SB 1720 might eventually have repercussions on the broader Florida economy.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF SB 1720 ON THE FLORIDA ECONOMY

A number of focus group participants pondered the ultimate influence of SB 1720 on the state of Florida. When they become available, quantitative data on the effects of SB 1720 on completion and transfer rates will be essential in understanding the long-term and larger societal impact of the legislation. Many participants expressed the view that SB 1720 was intended to make state colleges more cost effective by eliminating what legislators perceived as redundant and oftentimes ineffective DE programs. An advisor explained:

I think what she highlighted also seems to be evident in just the logic of the law itself is that if the state has already paid for students in high school to be college ready, then why should they also pay for remedials?

Still, campus personnel believed that the legislation had actually been quite costly both for institutions and for students. A faculty member remarked that

initially she thought the "legislation was penny-wise and pound-foolish. Now I don't even think it was penny-wise." A faculty member at another institution explained:

You know, I believe the decision to do what they do is a financial decision to save the state tons of money, but it's changing a lot of people's lives at the same time, and it's causing some people to have to leave college when they might not have left had they entered it [DE classes] correctly.

Many participants pondered what would happen to students who dropped out after multiple attempts to pass gateway courses. A faculty member expressed this concern, "Because students that take [MAT] 1033 fail. Take 1033 again, fail. They're like, 'You know what? I'm not going to finish my degree because I'm never going to pass this.'" A faculty member described what she believed were the effects of this scenario on students:

My biggest concern is that people come here to change their lives, and the bill has opted – has given them the ability to make decisions that ultimately affect their ability to make that change because they're making a bad decision and it leads to this situation, where after a first semester of making a bad decision, in the second semester, their back is against the wall...They've jeopardized their financial aid, and for a large majority of our students, that means they can't come back to school 'cause they don't have the financial resources to pay for this...So, instead of improving lives, they're actually changing lives for the worse.

In our focus groups, campus personnel were troubled about the long-term implications of students dropping out after multiple gateway attempts. A faculty member observed that "...as a society, what

does this look like in 20 years? ...What does that do to the quality of the person and ...everything as we move forward? It's not just a problem that is one or two semesters long." An instructor expressed frustrations with SB 1720 given the traditional mission of community colleges, "It's too bad because community college was the second chance for a lot of people and this eliminates the second chance."

Regarding the long-term impact of the legislation, one faculty member said, "So we're drawing a line on the board and we're saying, "The ones on this area we can help. These go somewhere else. Because we're making it impossible for you." Campus personnel were concerned that if completion rates were to decrease in the FCS, particularly for populations such as economically disadvantaged students, students would indeed "go somewhere else." Focus group participants worried that students would be more likely to accept low-wage service industry jobs, might

rely more on government entitlements, or would be more likely to be incarcerated after turning to crime without other means of support. Regarding this possibility, an administrator remarked:

And then guess what? You're gonna take their financial aid away. Because they had low GPA. So we set 'em up for failure, and then we're gonna take their money, and where are they gonna go back to? They're gonna go back into their neighborhoods. And what are they gonna do then? They have to make a living. And then before you know it, you're going to have more people in jail. Because they're gonna do things to try to make a living.

Having examined focus group participants' perceptions of the financial impact of 1720, we now consider faculty perceptions of college student readiness in the FCS.

Section Five: Faculty Perspectives on College Student Readiness

During our visits, faculty perspectives on college student readiness emerged as a major theme. Many faculty perspectives centered on their perceptions of SB 1720, curricular changes, faculty workload and work pressure, as well as student preparedness and outcomes of the implementation. In this section, we summarize findings from faculty and advisors in the areas of student academic preparation.

COLLEGE STUDENT PREPAREDNESS

Faculty and advisors universally noted that more

students are bypassing DE and entering directly into gateway courses since the implementation of the Senate Bill. Both also identified pervasive student under-preparedness in gateway courses. Many spoke of knowledge gaps for first time in college students as well as for those returning after time away from college. One instructor stated, "[Students are] coming in with less, a less developed skill level into both English and math." Another replied;

...within seven years they've graduated from high school. Well, if you haven't... written an essay... or

done a math problem in six years, what you knew six years ago is not gonna translate to walking in the door now when there's no PERT exam or anything to test where are you right now.

Faculty believed that SB 1720 had increased the numbers of students in gateway courses who did not belong there. One professor noted, "...I teach the gateway course, the first college-level course. So the population in that class is a lot of unprepared students coming into that class not facing reality as to that they don't belong in the course."

Faculty spoke at length of the lack of academic preparation and increased student failure in gateway. A math instructor remarked on this issue, "So we have seen a huge decline in our DE program and an increase in our [MAT] 1033, which is our intermediate algebra. We've also seen a decline in pass rates because we know that they are not prepared..." One instructor remarked that in gateway courses there is less time for "scaffolding", or building students' core understanding of the content, as is typical in DE. One instructor remarked that as students bypass DE, they are "drowning," which increases their likelihood of "quitting, dropping out. So there's no retention."

In addition to a broader continuum of levels of academic preparation in gateway courses, faculty also noted greater variation in the backgrounds of students enrolled in DE. English language learners, students with learning disabilities, and physically impaired students are now more frequently seen in the same course sessions. As a result, instructors state they have to quickly accommodate course content with supplemental techniques and tools to meet these individual needs. The new diversity, however, makes it more difficult for the instructors to reach each student effectively.

In addition, as students opt out of DE they encounter fewer opportunities for socialization to college. A faculty member noted, "I think we're losing some qualitative aspects... the effect... of feeling prepared. I mean our DE instructors...are our most supportive instructors. They're the gate openers. We've lost our gate openers, you know..." An administrator spoke in regard to the DE faculty, "I mean you guys [the instructors] have thrown everything but the kitchen sink at these students. ...there's been a huge impact... the ancillary stuff that goes with student success."

Faculty also noted that in skipping DE, students miss key opportunities to acquire foundational study and life skills, basic computer skills, and general knowledge about how to be a student. DE instructors had been "teaching them [students] how to become a student... (where) they can be more successful." An instructor added that the goal of DE was to "teach students to fish," which is not always conveyed by gateway faculty. Students who do not enroll "...miss out on conversations that are rooted in DE courses", as "...gateway instructors have time only for quick overviews before entering into core content." An instructor remarked that without DE, students do not understand "how to do college."

Insufficient computer skills were now a concern as well, as technology was used often to address student preparedness. One instructor stated, "The ones in my classes that don't have student success are not getting those computer skills the minute they come in, so I'm having to teach them. So it takes away from what I'm teaching, so it makes a problem..." Concerns also persisted among faculty and advisors about the lack of testing requirement under SB 1720 for students entering college. In regard to the lack of knowledge and skills, one instructor stated, "...we can't require them to go back and just brush up on them."

Instructors expressed concern that this lack of preparation would begin to affect students' other coursework, like history and science. One faculty member remarked, "It trickles up to every gateway course...if they do not have these foundational skills." The faculty member stated that compressed DE or no DE affords inadequate time to form relationships and create motivation essential for underprepared student success:

...Cause clearly we all have a common idea of: Is this too short of a time for our developmental students? These people need their hand held. They need a unique relationship build. We need to earn and figure out how to motivate these people...

Faculty created compressed and modularized offerings in response to the legislation, however they noted that success in these redesigned offerings is dependent on students' levels of self-regulation. One instructor's perception was that students often lack the independent management to be successful in either gateway or modified DE courses. For example, in DE writing, students can now fulfill the lab section of the course at home. One instructor expressed concern with this change. He stated:

I always tell my students, I say, 'That's good news and bad news. It's good news 'cause you can do it at home. It's bad news cause you can do it at home.' Because they're gonna sit there at home and they're just gonna procrastinate, procrastinate, procrastinate, procrastinate...

A math instructor corroborated this finding, "We did try to modularize... We tried to do it in a lab setting so it would have been like the typical instruction type course."

She continued:

We were not successful. Our students weren't successful where you were talking about the whole problem that they have to self-regulate. We tried to do a four-week or an eight-week. ...but we just couldn't get seem to get them to come to the lab to do the modules.

Because of this, instructors stated that in some instances, in-class instruction was more beneficial. An English professor remarked, "I don't think it's very effective because first of all, like you said, they just procrastinate till the last second. So what are they actually learning?"

She continued:

So even if you say, 'Here's a lab with six modules and let's make deadlines.' The six deadlines are still just gonna procrastinate. I think the chance to do any learning in that type of online environment at [name of software developer] is just very limited. You really need the face-to-face to be effective.

Compressed offerings were noted by faculty at several institutions as inadequate. These courses do not provide sufficient time, in the view of faculty, for students to address preparation and remediation needs. Faculty frequently observed that eight-weeks was too short to "cram" key information into the course, and faculty noted few students are passing. One instructor stated:

...You know, you can't take somebody that's at that low of a level and cram that much math into 'em in eight weeks or four weeks or whatever the heck we were trying – it just did not work. I had the oddball student who finishes quickly, but I would say that's probably three people in the last eight years. But most of 'em need the full – they just cannot do it that fast. Not if their skill set's that low. It just doesn't – does not work. ...for math.

A math instructor remarked on the compressed offering as well:

...the eight weeks and eight weeks. My success rate dropped to less than 50 percent. And it was too fast. They couldn't learn that fast. And, I mean, I can't go slower 'cause I have to finish the curriculum, and I was just leaving people in the dust.

FACULTY RESPONSES TO STUDENT PREPAREDNESS

Instructors reported spending significant time redesigning DE to engage students, while adjusting rigor or class procedures slightly in gateway offerings. Faculty also reported using additional curricular strategies in DE to entice students to enroll. At one institution, the faculty changed DE course syllabi to make the courses more appealing to students. An instructor spoke at length regarding these changes:

What we've done, though, is we've kind of adjusted our syllabus a little bit to make it more inviting for them to work, because if they actually work and finish all the topics, it's almost guaranteed that they are going to pass. So we've arranged the syllabus to say if you finished all your topics, and I mean we do have checkpoints to make sure they are the ones that are doing the work, because that's another major problem.

She continued, "We don't give any tests in this class. If you do all your topics and you hit the checkpoints... If you finish all your topics, we are going to give you 100% for 65% of the class."

Instructors at one institution created a system where they work with students to create their daily schedules to independently complete modularized courses. The schedules were implemented to assist students in tracking their progress themselves in the computer coursework. Students use the tool and can adhere to

the self-assigned learning goals and due dates. Given such assistance from the instructors, some students were able to work ahead and finish modules ahead of time. An instructor remarked of the system:

We went through and created a daily schedule for the entire semester and broke it down. You're gonna take this test. This is what you should do, and some students really love it. They like to cross things off and highlight it.

Instructors provided in-depth feedback on exams and tools to promote student cognitive development. The general consensus from faculty, however, was that students fail to use the supports well, or obligations such as work, inhibit their ability to take advantage of supports. Students at some institutions have stated that they prefer help directly from instructors instead of help from student service centers.

This, of course, places additional time burdens on faculty. Faculty from several institutions state they now use more extensive office hours and class time for academic and supplemental supports and provide access to increased resources to help students succeed. Examples of increased instructor academic support are study groups, study habits coaching, group work, board work, working problems, practice exams, and extra practice. An instructor remarked that she had yet to observe full return on these efforts due to the degree of under-preparation. She explained:

So we do involuntarily try and do things to help students succeed. 'Cause I know in College Algebra, I started making – for my homework – it's a practice test... But I require that as their homework. And then they come in and take the test... [I] mix 'em around a little bit. But I'm still having high failure rate. I just don't know what more I can do.

Some instructors now feel an obligation to informally advise students regarding classes. One faculty member helped a student make an advising decision by stating, "...Here is my phone number. ...you can come straight to me and you won't have to wait in line for two hours to see somebody different. I'll be happy to sit down and – well, of course, never heard from him again."

Instructors reported that students appear to need help but are also disengaged and potentially distracted by outside obligations. One instructor stated, "But we know that they work and they have other commitments and they have busy lives and so...They don't come in for the extra help that they would need in order to successfully perform in the class."

In response, the faculty has used myriad ways to engage students, including extra credit for lab work, office hours, and using relevant and applicable assignments. However, in general, students tend not to complete these activities. One instructor remarked, "Yeah. I give them extra credit on their papers if they bring me a reviewed paper from the lab and in a semester, I may get, per paper assignment, maybe three students that do it." She continued, "A lot of times the ones that do the extra credit are not the ones that need it."

Faculty also stated that students do not know how to ask for help, and consequently miss the benefit of academic support services. An instructor commented on this issue:

They disappear and they don't even talk to you. Then when you see them maybe one day, and you tell them, 'What happened to you?' They go like, 'No, I was doing so bad I felt...' I'm like, 'But at least come and talk to me and we would have found maybe a solution or I can guide you to.' But they

just, that's the thing, they don't talk. Or at least don't talk to the right people. They talk to a friend and the friend says, 'Yeah, I'll drop it too. Drop it with me. Let's go to the beach.'

Student apathy was also noted by professors. One professor stated that exempt students will enroll in DE, however fail to take it seriously. He remarked:

I almost find that they are more apathetic to learning. Just they know that they are supposed to take a course but I think that they know for some of them that it's not required and they will go on anyway. ...they come to the class because they know if they are absent too much I can withdraw them for not attending.

Instructors felt that students do not see the value in DE, as they receive no college credit for attending. Additionally, faculty observed deficiencies in student cognitive awareness and self-regulation for success. One instructor remarked:

They don't self-diagnose. Which is a problem. They don't sit there and say, 'Gee, I need help. Let me do something different.' They believe that just doing the same thing over and over again is going to produce a different result. We all know it doesn't. We speak to them. I write notes on their test. You even offer extra credit for homework. It's something that they are supposed to be doing any way and nothing changes.

COURSE RIGOR AND PERCEIVED WORKLOAD PRESSURE

Instructors had mixed views on whether the rigor of gateway courses had been affected by the influx of underprepared students. Many instructors agreed that class standards and rigor in the face of student under-preparedness have remained unchanged. One instructor stated, "...I mean I do everything possible,

but I'm not gonna reduce the standard of the course." Another remarked on the rigor of gateway courses since the legislation:

[It] hasn't changed the curriculum. That's the one thing we kept and especially in our gateway course. We kept everything the same... The only thing we implemented is that the software that we are using for the class allows those students who are not prepared for the class to get that concept they need to prepare. They do have to do the work, but it's given to them on the first day.

In other cases, however, faculty found it necessary to adjust rigor somewhat in gateway courses. One instructor stated, "Are we sacrificing, right? And for us in [ENC] 1101... here's where they are... let me change what I'm doing a little bit. Let me meet them where they are." Another faculty member remarked on a more dramatic change. He finds it usual to now:

...go back and teach some of the skills that would've been taught in developmental education... when we have a student who doesn't know how to read very well, it's kinda hard. So we have to go back and adjust the curriculum either one of two ways: change the assignment or lower our expectations on the assignment.

Faculty reported feeling pressured by administration to move students through courses while also ensuring they learn the material adequately. One faculty stated, "At some point, it's gonna be, either I can keep my job or - ...I have to water it down and get more people out and get an 'A,' cause now the president, everybody's happy." Another faculty member agreed that instructors may be tempted to "give you whatever success rates you want,"

particularly if success rates are increasingly tied to funding. Another instructor remarked in regard to the pressure felt by faculty:

And I also see a dual pressure... We are pressured one, to put out, produce competent students who make the university proud, give us a great workforce... right? And we are also pressured to: "What are you doing to help the students succeed?" Well, most teachers... you devote your life, your work life to making sure students succeed. But how much more can you go? When I hear you talking about the extra office time, and you're an English instructor, so you spend all that time grading essays, giving feedback on essays. And then you're having to add extra time. Not that we are selfish people. But to expand your workload that's already pretty big. So you get both pressures: produce competent students, help the students more and more who are coming with deficits. And between that, I feel squeezed.

In addition to administrative pressures, instructors stated ethical concerns in regard to issuing passing grades in the cases when students are not wholly prepared to enter the next level of coursework. "It's huge. It's huge" reported a faculty member, "...the ethical part of this is on our shoulders as well 'cause there's the push to success and retention. Where are those success rates? What are we proving?"

After examining faculty and advisor perceptions of student academic readiness, we turn to student perspectives, first of the advising process and then of the curriculum and faculty.

Section Six: Student Perspectives on Advising Processes

Advisors and advising recommendations play a pivotal role in student success in college. Unsurprisingly, advisors and advising practices therefore composed much of the student discussion in focus groups. Most students recognized the important role advisors played in their matriculation and later success.

Students gave mixed views on the quality of advising they received. Many expressed positive views of advisors and the advising process. One student surmised, “The advisor is the most important thing when you enter college because if you do not have the right one, you’ll be lost.”

The participants in our focus group often relied on advisors to make course-taking decisions. The student indicated, “I make those [course-taking] decisions based on going to my advisor.” Students frequently highlighted advising personnel whom they held in high regard. A student said, “She like, knows, what I can do right now. She was really good.” Describing another advisor, a student remarked, “She’s wonderful, and she’s been advising me as far as what classes to take and what I should do.” A third student revealed, “When I signed up, I had a really nice advisor, who helped me out and talked me through, you know, like, oh, what’s your timeframe? How many classes do you want to take?” Older returning students often had challenges with technology and seemed to prefer in-person advising sessions. This was view was supported by this non-traditional age student, “So I had no clue. I didn’t know where you click, who you click, how you click. So I had to rely on the counselors.”

Additionally, students pointed out that advisors often assisted them by recommending certain professors

they determined to be highly successful with students who needed more support. The students told us, “They [advisors] also referred to, to teachers who are, who are doing, who are in classes that were very, um, very good. And they said ‘Hey, maybe you should take this class.’”

Some students expressed more negative perceptions of advising. Some noted that their advising sessions felt rushed, and as a result, they were initially underprepared to navigate the basics of college life. One student disclosed:

I walked in, she gave me classes, I left. That was the end of it. I didn’t even know what they were, where to go, or what books I needed. I only knew what building it was, I didn’t know what floor or anything, but thanks to high school, I figured out through the numbers, like, ‘Oh, 200 is second floor’—stuff like that. So, I found it.

A student at another institution said:

It was very difficult to enroll and to – I mean, like, I went to the like open house where you have the first conference and they speak about the subjects and everything, but it’s very difficult because you don’t know which office, where to go, and when you go to a department, they tell you like no.

Several students were not convinced that advisors were focused on student success. One student observed, “The advisors don’t really care; they’re just trying to get you in and out quicker.” Numerous students admitted using peer recommendations as the basis for course-taking decisions. For example,

a student stated, “I was kinda lost, I didn’t know what to take . . . just asking my brother what to take and some of my friends.” One student who had never been to advising exposed weaknesses in the system noting, “When you look me up in the system, I don’t know about you, but it says no advisor. I can’t see anybody. Now I’m selective though. I know who the bad ones are and what not.” Students found out who the ‘bad’ ones [advisors] were often by word of mouth.

Some students believed institutional structures were to blame for inadequacies in advising. A third student linked advisor caseload to the experience of feeling rushed out of advising offices. The student assessed the situation in this way:

I mean regardless of the fact that they’re still adjusting; it’s understandable why the advisement right now is not in the best state to help out, because for example, for the medical counselor, there’s only one counselor for all five campuses that has to go every week and organize it. So it’s a lot of students that she has to deal with. So it’s understandable why she tries to help them out in the small time that she has, but I feel like if they have more staff on each section that would probably help out with the load.

Students’ perceptions of advising identified several functional areas that warrant consideration. These include developmental education, unnecessary or redundant course-taking, specialized advisors, and intent to transfer.

THE DE OPTION

In discussing the effect of SB 1720 on student course choices, students were unaware of the legislation and how it altered developmental coursework options in Florida. A student who had taken a developmental

math course lamented, “If they [advisors] told me I had a choice, I wouldn’t, but they didn’t tell me anything.” Another student said, “They [advisors] didn’t tell me if it was gonna count for my major, they didn’t tell me like it was – they didn’t really tell me anything.”

Other students shared how they made their decisions to enroll in DE. Students cited length of time out of school, and the realization that there were gaps in their learning as reasons for opting-in to developmental classes. In most cases, the choice to enroll was based on the recommendations of advisors whom they respected. One student who scored better than he expected on the placement test voiced how important advisor guidance was in nonetheless deciding to enroll in developmental courses:

[She] was like, ‘you know, we’re still gonna enroll you because you haven’t done it in a while.’ She’s like, ‘We wanna get your feet back wet before you go jump straight into college algebra.’ She’s like, ‘I don’t want you to fail that way.’ Which I understand—I completely want to do that. I want to get back through it, and she set me up with the perfect professors. Math right now? On point.

Some students, however, ignored advisor recommendations and chose to enroll in gateway courses with differing outcomes. A student who was ultimately successful in the gateway class said:

But they did say like we said that you have to take a developmental course in high school, so it might be better for you if you do take a development course, even though you technically don’t have to. I decided against it, which I’m actually pretty happy with because of the teacher I got through the math class that I was taking. She was very understanding. She was willing to work with us, and not just try to push us along too fast.

You know, she taught it at a pace that was very understandable with us. So I'm very happy with my choice.

More than one student described how they chose not to enroll in DE courses but in-class assessments provided a reality check. One student explained:

I was supposed to take MAT 0025, but I took MAT 1033, and my first day of class the professor's like, 'All right, take this test, if you get – it's like a ten-question test, if you get six wrong, you should switch to MAT 0025,' and I got one right and I was like Jesus Christ . . . so I did switch out and I went through it.

UNNECESSARY CLASSES

A recurrent theme within all student focus groups was enrollment in unnecessary classes. Students tied this problem to advisor recommendations. A student shared the following situation:

I wasted three semesters, so technically speaking, I'm already supposed to have graduated [name of institution], but I just wasted my whole time taking a bunch of prerequisites, but it's like, I'm fresh. I'm new to taking college here, so I didn't know any better to be like, 'Okay, let me go and check.' First of all, they had me as an AA, an associate's of arts, instead of an associate's – So it's like, whosoever was doing my orientation, they put me under the wrong thing in the system, so all the other advisors I was taking was like, 'You know what? Let me just give her general stuff, biology, biology lab and all of this.'

Several students explained that unnecessary classes affected them financially. A student stated "It sucks, because for me as a person who pays for classes . . . and then getting your advisor to say you're not supposed

to take that class, it's kind of hard, because you already finished that class and you waste \$300.00 on a class."

In response, some students took it upon themselves to check and recheck their programs of study. Sometimes students' course taking complications were solved by meeting with a more knowledgeable advisor. This student shared her experience:

I saw one person . . . He was like, 'Okay, what are you studying?' He's like, 'That's not what here.' I'm like, 'What are you saying? That's what I'm supposed to have.' He's like, 'How many advisors have you seen?' 'Like five different advisors and nobody has ever told me that I'm doing the wrong thing the whole time,' so I was wasting my year and a half in college. He's the one who got on top of everything. I changed my major. That same day he made me fill out the application. That same day, I was accepted into the program, so he made that all happen within literally three hours, so I was like, 'Well, I'm sticking with you. He was really good. All the other advisors kind of were like . . . they're just saying the things that they say to everyone.'

SPECIALIZED ADVISORS

Perceptions of advisors and advising processes were a major focus of students' discussions. Students often differentiated between 'generalist advisors' and 'specialist advisors' and expressed their preference for specialist advisors. Students noted that the lack of advisors with knowledge of specific majors was not optimal. A student remarked, "The general advisor is really not that helpful, but the ones that are in the major are more helpful." Students wanted advisors with specialized knowledge of their majors to better assist them in making course choices.

Specialist advisors were thought to have a better command of unique subject pathways for degree

programs as well as prerequisites for transfer to four-year institutions. One student stated that the specialized advisor was able to engage in more holistic advising when compared to the prescriptive advising of the generalist advisor. The student remarked:

I was like, okay, I know school is supposed to start again and we're gonna see another advisor, a random person to just give me some classes. But now that I'm in the program, I have an assigned advisor, so I'll see her once a month, but I don't even wanna talk to her about advising because she helps me with other stuff' . . . [We discuss] things about the program that I'm in, like other stuff, my job here, and life.

The lack of advisor specialization was identified by students as a critical obstacle to their progression through a major. Students stated that advisors could give guidance in general subject areas but were less effective in advising for specific majors. One student stated:

It's just very generic and they don't even know themselves either. They'll go online. They get their resources where we would get our resources. Unless you have a specific advisor like the way I have, but the other ones, they just go online. They look up your program of study. They look at the generic and then they said, 'This is what you need to take,' which is what students can do themselves.

Several students complained about the effect advisor recommendations had on their academic outcomes.

A poignant example was offered by a student:

I could have graduated with honors, but my advisor said that I couldn't get in the Honors Program. Then I met with the coordinator of the honors coordinator and she said that I could have gotten in when I got here. I had the GPA for it.

Because of that, it was too late. I already had all my credits. I can't graduate with honors. I just think some of the advisors can use more training or they can use more research to see what they're talking about.

These students' comments bolster the claim that faculty and staff interactions with students can foster or inhibit academic integration with the institution and the possibility of academic success. The influence of these interactions extended beyond students' current programs into their future academic and professional goals. Several students in the focus groups talked about difficulties relative to their intent to transfer.

TRANSFER CONFUSION

Students also expressed that they did not feel fully supported by advisors in preparing for their future transfer plans. Some students wanted more direct input from advisors. A student said:

Sometimes the advisors don't really know what they're talking about. They'll tell you that you need to take one thing and then you come back again and they tell you don't need to take that; and you're just going back and forth taking different classes that you don't need. It really comes down to sometimes, you look at your university and look at the prerequisites that you need. Sometimes they're not always sure of the information that they're relaying to you. Yeah. You have to directly contact the university that you want to transfer it to.

Additionally, during our conversations with students we came across students who had not consulted with advisors when choosing classes because of a lack of confidence in advisors' knowledge about transfer requirements. A student who intended to transfer to a four-year college told us:

My advisor really didn't have a game plan to set up for me. When I had to choose my college, I found the school I wanted to go to, so I had to actually go through the [name of institution] site and make sure that the course codes lined up so that I could get my full prerequisites here and not have to find the classes somewhere else. So, I basically walked in with a list of classes and was like, 'Find me my first term, and we'll be good.' . . . And that's how I've been doing it so far . . . So, they didn't have much of a job for that aspect.

Some students were getting transfer guidance from sources outside of advising offices. One student explained, for example, that she got transfer information from a peer:

I know, one of them, he's majoring in business and he actually got me the information I needed from FAU, because at one point in time I was interested in psychology, so he got me all the prerequisites and stuff like that. Some of them [advisors] don't care enough to go the extra mile and figure out what they're talking about and do the research. Especially with a community college, I think they're supposed to work with the university and get their input. Because if there are students from community college transferring to the university, they should be working hand-in-hand.

Another transfer student's experience showed how ineffective advising for university transfer could be. The student explained:

I actually had a whole ordeal that I had to talk to, like, the head of some of the departments because they're, like, oh yeah, you need to take this class, and I was, like, but I've taken two humanities in a different college and I came here and then they're telling me I have to take another one, so I actually

had to sign up for a class. And then one of the women I work with . . . and I sat down with her one day 'cause she overheard me talking to my supervisor about it and she's, like, 'oh come here, come here,' and she sat down with me and she was, like, 'Oh yeah, you don't need to take this class at all!'

STUDENTS SELF-ADVISING

During our conversations with students we encountered several students who did not consult with advisors when choosing classes. One student disclosed, "I still haven't seen an advisor. Last semester was my first semester, so I've been here for a couple of months or whatever. I've been picking my classes very well without them. . ." An interesting finding that emerged from the data was that students were 'shopping around' for advisors. For example, receiving advising recommendations from more than one advisor was not prudent for one student in the focus group and the unforeseen consequences were far reaching. The student shared his experience:

Because, you'll go to one advisor, they'll say something else. Then you'll hop to another advisor and they'll say a different thing. Yeah. My major is economics, so I don't like math, so I was trying to avoid taking math classes. So, I talked to one of the advisors. I told her I was gonna switch to this major, because economics, there's math, but it's not as intensive. I think the high stuff is calculus and that's about it. I think it's pre-calculus. She was telling me, 'No. You need to take all of these classes,' because the other advisor didn't tell me that I would have to take Accounting I, II, and III. I was only informed that I would have to take Accounting I. So, then I had to learn that I had to take all of these classes. I think I learned at the start of this semester, so I was like 'Wow.' I had to change my whole educational plan and everything.

As a result, students spoke of consulting institutional websites and other documents to evaluate course objectives before enrolling. One student commented, “Sometimes it’s possible to look at the content of what the teacher is teaching.” A second student shared “I just look and...read the syllabus. And see who the instructor is. You know if it sounds like something I would enjoy, I go for it. So, if you’re not interested in that you’re probably not gonna take it.” Additionally, students considered the volume of assigned work when choosing a class. A student stated, “And if there’s a lot of writing, a lot of essays, I don’t mind four and five essays, but you start going in to 4- and 5,000 words, eh, you gotta cut it down a little bit.”

Across the board, whether or not students reviewed course syllabi prior to enrolling, they consulted Rate My professor when making course decisions. One student described the process, “For me, it depends on what people say on Rate My Professor. So, I need to see what form they will be teaching it and I need to see what’s on Rate My Professor.” The ‘form’ included information about whether the course was offered online versus face-to-face and the length of the class. A student told us “I can’t do online and hybrid isn’t enough for me cause I like the attention of being in the classroom.” A second student who preferred longer semesters said, “It’s hard finding a 13-week class cause everything is 8 weeks.”

Section Seven: Student Perspectives on Curriculum and Instructional Staff

Student focus group participants in our study had varying perspectives on the DE and gateway curriculum they encountered at the nine institutions we visited. In this section, we examine student perceptions of both the DE curriculum and the gateway curriculum and consider some specific student concerns related to compressed courses and online coursework. We then present student perspectives on the traits they found most helpful in instructional staff and those they found most detrimental to their academic success.

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE DE CURRICULUM

Student perceptions of the DE curriculum were evenly split between those who believed it provided

them a necessary foundation for future, college-level coursework and those who believed DE courses were unnecessary and unhelpful. This split among our focus group participants was evident in the words of one student who observed groups of students, some of whom he believed needed DE and others he believed did not:

In my opinion, I think that class [DE math] is – it’s very needed for some of the people in that class. But there is a couple of people I feel like don’t need to be in that class at all. And they were just placed there because they didn’t take the PERT or anything, so like I feel like it’s an okay class, but some people need it, but other people definitely do not. They, you, they should test people before they put them in that class.

This student echoed the view of most advisors and faculty who lamented the loss of the placement test requirement to distinguish between those most likely to benefit from DE and those who might not benefit.

DE as a Necessary Foundation

In describing what they perceived as the necessity of DE, a number of students used the metaphor of the foundation on a house that would either keep the building strong or, if too weak, would undermine the entire structure. An English language learner described DE this way:

...I was glad I took it [DE] because it gave me the foundations for what I needed later on. It's like a building. If you don't have a strong foundations then you may be able to build one level or two level, but then it's gonna fall apart. So I do appreciate that.

Similarly, a student at another institution described how DE laid the foundation for the college-level classes in her major:

But my thing is that each course that I've taken I realize how it was taking me to the next step for each one. And now that I am – and when I took the writing course, the English composition class online, I was referring back to my books and notes from those previous [DE] classes. And I'm like, 'Oh, my god, now I get it.' It was a little struggle during the time of the courses. But I got it now. And everything falls into place with these courses as I'm continuing to, the courses that I need to take for the occupational therapy [major]. Everything is falling into place. And it's like the light just flickering a little bit still. But it's a good thing. It's really been helpful.

An older student believed not only that the DE English courses improved his writing, but also credited the DE math instructor with preparing him to take algebra later. This was a class he had previously struggled with:

I had to take developmental writing, and for me, for my professor that I had, it absolutely, 100 percent turned me into a better writer.... And everything sounds so much more better—it feels much better, I feel more confident writing anything, at any time. And I've gotten compliments on stuff that I write and things that I've done, and it's helped me develop even more. So I think those classes are great. Right now, I'm in developmental math, and I can tell you, in high school, I sucked at algebra. I was horrible. I was the kid in the back of the class asleep, because I did not understand it. [Laughter] But because now, the professor that I have, I'm breezing through algebra. Like, you would think I've been doing it for years, and I haven't done it in God knows how long, so these courses are great.

Another older student explained that she believed DE had helped her to be a more critical thinker. The benefits are expected to carry far beyond the subject matter of one class or discipline. Instead, this student believed DE coursework laid a foundation she can draw upon in future classes:

...As far as taking those developmental classes. I don't care what anybody says, if you haven't been in school – I graduated in '91, and I really haven't taken the remedial classes in many years. We have done basically technical class stuff and... that helps you critically think. And now as far as I'm concerned, I need them. They're only going to make me stronger when it comes to critically thinking to getting into the other classes I need....

Because if I don't know the basics I'm not going to get very far, and I don't want to waste that time.

While this student and others believed DE had saved them time in the long run by laying a strong foundation for future learning, other students expressed the opposite view.

DE as a Waste of Time

The student most likely to regard DE negatively were non-exempt students close to the cutoff score for gateway courses and those who felt DE coursework lacked academic challenge. One student (possibly non-exempt) explained that he felt he wasted a year by enrolling in DE math courses prior to MAT 1033:

So I was never told it was an option, so I took that class once but the – it was all online, but the professor said that we could use our calculators and at the final they said we couldn't, so I failed the final, and then I had to take it again in the spring and then that one was a better professor, like they helped more. And then I took MAT 1033 in the summer. So I wasted a whole year.

A student at a different institution expressed frustration at missing the cutoff score for gateway English by a single point. Because she had attended a private high school, she was deemed “non-exempt” under the new legislation and therefore required to take DE courses because of her test scores:

...I missed meeting the English entry score by a point, and I got put in remedial English class. And to me the feeling of that, knowing I missed it by one point and still having to go through a whole semester. And the other thing that got me was I didn't even need English for what I was doing. So, that's one thing that kind of bugged me about it

was that – and in my own words it kind of felt like it was penalizing me for going to a private school...

Another student felt misled when an instructor told him later that he could have opted out of a DE course that he found academically undemanding:

Well, I got told that I needed to take the class, it would really help me out, so I'm like, 'Alright, I'll take it.' And then when I found out that – one of my teachers told me...you're not obligated to take the remedial course...so it was extremely easy and I feel like it was useless me taking that class, just a waste of my time because I passed with an A when I didn't study at all. So I feel – and some parts it should be remedial...but in my case, I feel it was a waste of time taking a remedial class.

In addition to some students characterizing DE as a “waste of time,” students in our focus groups frequently complained of problems with two specific types of DE courses: compressed classes and online courses.

Compressed Classes

With only one exception, all the students in our focus groups who were enrolled in compressed DE courses described them as rushed. Typical of this sentiment was the following exchange between four students at one college:

Student 1: All the developmental classes I've taken... they've been helpful, but the problem is they're 8-week courses, not the full 16...

Student 2: ...But, I didn't realize when I went to the advisor, they're like, 'Well, you probably want to take this class.' And here it's an eight-week, and I didn't realize eight-week, and it's my first time. I've always taken 16 weeks. I didn't know

that they were accelerated. I wouldn't've taken an accelerated class because –

Student 3: It's horrible.

Student 2: I don't even know, my head is literally – it feels like it's spinning. It really does because I'm trying to keep up on every subject and step and homework and whatever they expect from you.

Student 3: To do this you literally have to give up your complete life. You better not have kids. You better not have a job. You better have nothing.... Because cramming this, it's like you do not have time to blink.

Student 2: Yeah. I won't do that again.

Student 3: Yeah. It's been a nightmare....

Student 4: I failed it. I failed that math class.

Student 3: I'm struggling. I mean, my house is falling apart. Everything is falling apart. It's – yeah. Too much.

Student 2: You've got to slow down. They do have 16-week, and I do feel – I took the math class in 16-week, I see that it's – I'm getting more of the information. They're going to have more time, they're going to spend more time with you as opposed to when you take the eight-week everything is very much rushed...

The sole exception to the views shared above was a student at another institution who liked the rapid pace and total concentration required to succeed in an accelerated course:

I enjoy the pace, because once you get in there, you've got to lock in, you've got to focus. There's no way around it, but they make sure you get it, and before you blink and look up, the mini-mester's over with—but you've come so far in it. So as long

as you're there, you show up, and you focus, you'll have no problem with it.

Like compressed coursework, negative perceptions of online DE coursework were more prevalent, though some disagreed.

Online Coursework and ALEKS

One, frequent concern with online coursework and ALEKS was that students aren't equally comfortable with computers. One student expressed sadness that paper materials and resources have largely been phased out of college classes:

But since I'm not a very great in math, I didn't really like it [online courses] and it really was difficult for me to do things online. I am not – this new thing that's been going on about everything online, turning everything online and nothing's on paper now is aggravating me for a while....So, um, and that was my difficulty in that developmental math. It was online and the teacher, it was a very big class...but I just I didn't feel like that class was working out for me at all.

Expressing a minority opinion, another student stated, "So, the one thing is that, find the way you learn, 'cause now I know I learn best by doing things on the computer. I take mostly computer classes."

Some of the negative perceptions related to online coursework were fueled by frustration with the ALEKS system, which was used in fully online, hybrid, DE modularized math classes, and gateway math courses. Indeed, students at several institutions reported feeling overwhelmed by the amount of work involved with ALEKS and by the adaptive system which continuously added problems when modules were

completed. One student explained his frustration with the system's programming:

I like it [ALEKS] to an extent, but one thing that confuses me is it'll show – if you can't figure out the problem you could explain and they'll show you the problem. Like, okay, I understand – then as you go you've got four more left. You do four more correct and we're going to take this off your list. You go to do it – you miss one time you get down to two or three, and then it jumps, it says, 'Oh, you missed this problem, you've got four more to do.'

This student was discouraged by the programming that would not allow students to progress to a new topic until a prescribed number of questions were answered correctly. Another student echoed these sentiments: "You sit down... and then next thing you know... It just adds and adds and adds. You just added extra work to us, and that's when people get lackadaisical and start to drop behind, because it's too much work."

Like the mixed student perceptions of DE coursework, exempt students who opted out of DE and entered directly into gateway courses held a variety of perspectives on their choice.

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF GATEWAY CURRICULUM

Some students were pleased with their decision to advance to gateway courses and reported success in these courses. Representing this view, one student remarked on her positive experience in the gateway math course:

I think I was prepared. My professor – I took 1033... and my professor explained everything well. She

made sure that if I had any questions she answered that thoroughly. She also gave us like practice exams that we could redo a bunch of times... So that really helped me out.

Another student described being happy that she disregarded her advisor's recommendation to enroll in a DE course. She characterized her decision this way:

But they [advisors] did say like we said that you had to take a developmental course in high school, so it might be better for you if you do take a development course, even though you technically don't have to. I decided against it [taking DE], which I'm actually pretty happy with because of the teacher I got through the math class that I was taking. She was very understanding. She was willing to work with us, and not just try to push us along too fast. You know, she taught it as a pace that was very understandable with us. So I'm very happy with my choice.

Others regretted their decision. One student remarked, "I took 1033, MAT 1033, and in this moment I'm in 1105 college algebra... And it's a real struggle." Several students debated the relative merits of taking the alternate math pathway (statistics) instead of algebra as well as their difficulties with the ALEKS system:

Student 1: I'm taking stats online. It's the biggest mistake of my life... Me and statistics just don't get along. That's it.

Student 2: I just don't like ALEKS. I can't deal with ALEKS. I don't feel like it's beneficial... Math lab is okay. ALEKS is just too much.

Student 1: I feel like that makes people fail.

Student 2: Yeah, because you're just doing it just to do it.

Student 1: I failed an algebra class because of ALEKS.

Student 2: And that's a big part of your final grade.

Student 1: So I dropped algebra and started taking stats because I failed my intermediate algebra. I was like, 'I'm not going back to go retake a class just to have ALEKS fail again,' so we take steps.

Student 3: You give a choice, I'd rather take stats.

Student 1: I never knew I had a choice to choose between algebra and stats. When I got a new advisor in the program that I'm with, she was like, assigned to me. She was like, 'Yeah, you know you can take stats instead of algebra.' I'm like, 'Thank you.'

In each example, instructor quality mattered a great deal. Those with supportive, understanding faculty members reported satisfaction in their choice, while many who ended up in online courses without much of a faculty connection were left feeling unsatisfied. Having examined student perspectives on the curriculum, we now consider student perceptions of instructional staff at the nine institutions we visited in 2016-2017.

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF

Students in every focus group agreed on the central importance of instructional staff to their success at a state college. One student, for instance, observed, "The teacher always come first. Just like parents at the house, it's always the teacher." Illustrating this point, another student described how quickly classes taught by a popular instructor would fill up:

Yeah, I'm in developmental math, and I tell you, as fast as you can blink, [faculty name] class is

filled up. He is great at math. I mean, all across the board. Like, I'm not taking my algebra until I can get [faculty name]... [Faculty name] knows what he's doing—and man, when I say the day his class opened was on the 31st of October. It filled up that day.

Students in our focus groups described the traits they associated with the most effective instructors as well as the traits they associated with less effective faculty. Students noted that their favorite faculty were accessible, supportive, accommodating, and energetic. Students in our focus groups shared far fewer unfavorable views of faculty, but when they did, they highlighted instructors they perceived as impatient, unhelpful, and even rude.

Accessible Faculty

Again and again, students expressed their appreciation for faculty who devoted extra time and effort to helping students learn. Two students described a faculty member who was frequently accessible both in-person and via email:

Student 1: ...She [faculty member] was really good about it, like whenever I had a problem, or anyone in the class had a problem, she'd be willing to sit. 'Can I help you? Well, let's go back and look at this.' Or she'd – if we came in early, which is what a lot of us did because just because it was convenient, she'd even start class early and show us like, 'Oh, here's how you should have done the homework, you know, if you need to correct it tonight, go do that before it's due.'

Student 2: And I love that. That's awesome.

Student 1: And she responds to your e-mails. Like the bad teacher, she didn't even respond.

Faculty members, like this one, who support students “after hours” were described by students at several different colleges. A student at another college described a faculty member who allowed her to arrive 30 minutes before class for extra help:

I have my instructor that I go to, I have that class after my English class. So, I take my work, anything that I’m having issues with I take it right to that class and she goes over it with me....So, it’s really one-on-one. My class actually ends 30 minutes before my other one starts. So, she is actually even opened up that I can come to her before class even starts. So, I’ll go into her like 30 minutes, and she’ll help me more one-on-one.

An English language learner similarly described the individualized attention she got from faculty members:

People like me, I’m introvert. I don’t really want to raise my hand or ask the questions. Some time I like to just, you know to like one-on-one thing. So that’s a really great professor...you know she’ll be there for students. So that’s a really greatly appreciate those professor. Like [faculty name] she is always early. And also another professor [faculty name] he will be there like 8:30 in the morning for 9:00 class. So if I have questions or so he’s there early.

Because she was uncomfortable asking for help during class hours, faculty made themselves available at other times to accommodate her questions. Another frequently cited trait of effective faculty was supportiveness.

Supportive Faculty

Students in our focus groups seemed to agree that faculty could be distinguished by how much they cared about student success. This view was expressed in the following student exchange:

Student 1: I also think it’s something like you’re not gonna succeed if you have somebody that doesn’t care if you don’t.

Student 2: Right.

Student 3: Exactly.

Student 2: Like that extra parent, basically.

Student 3: So if you don’t have that one little extra nudge off the cliff, you’re not gonna make it.

Student 1: Yeah, you can tell like when a teacher like wants you to succeed, or when a teacher doesn’t.

A student at another institution gave her definition of a good professor:

From my point of view, a good professor is a professor who cares. By that means she is a positive professor and you will make you work harder than you can ever thought you can do it. But in a positive way. Not to make that you’re not good enough for the class and you should drop it. A good professor is a professor that cares about you and comes with a smile. And the professor wants to be in the classroom. It’s not like she will have or he will have something better to do and what are you doing here?

This student appreciated not only the professors’ positive encouragement but also her willingness to challenge students. Two additional students discussed a committed writing teacher:

Yeah, she’s really taught us the cores of writing, being all like, proper, you know? She’s not a grammar Nazi, but she’s very [Laughter]. She’s very proper and elegant with her writing, like, you know, putting commas or semicolons and you know, just helping us be more descriptive....But she loves her job, and she really helps us out, so.

Related to supportiveness was faculty members' flexibility and their willingness to accommodate struggling students.

Accommodating Faculty

Students frequently described faculty who worked tirelessly to accommodate their learning needs. Two students discussed a faculty member who was particularly patient:

Student 1: Yeah, like they [faculty] will support you. You know, if you're having trouble with grades, and they make the effort to help you, like if you reach out to them, and you want help, and they help you, that says a lot about them.

Student 2: Like actually ours [faculty name] she's pretty sweet. She will literally stand there the whole time to make sure you get one problem before we went on.

Student 1: Yeah, and be late for her class just because she wants to make sure you got what you want.

Student 2: [Imitating faculty member] 'Okay, does anyone have any questions? Okay.' Then she'd say, 'Are you sure?'

Student 1: 'Are you sure.'

Student 2: 'Are you positive? Do this again.' I wish more of my teachers were like that.

Students at another institution explained how much they benefited from the accommodations extended by instructors. Community college students often struggle to balance competing priorities, including work, family, and school, and these three students were no exception. Fortunately, their faculty members were willing to be flexible:

Student 1: Flexibility. Knowing you have real life issues still going on.

Student 2: I know – cause when you on the job it's something that's due, it is due. I understand that is a rule. But for them [faculty] to see the circumstances. Like you're normally on time and doing what you supposed to do, so this one particular instance, I'm not gonna knock you maybe as hard. But flexibility. That's the word. There we go....

Student 3: Yeah. Like she said, flexibility. I don't know what I would do without flexibility with the teachers that I currently have cause I'm in the process of moving. I have a niece. ...A three-week-old at my house. I'm taking care of my uncle. You know. I just got – and this was just like two weeks ago. Bam, here you go. Everything's in your lap. So I'm having to adjust everything. And I walked in because I missed school and their mouths dropped open cause I'm never not there. You know. And that was a good feeling because that was, you know my teacher knew that that was not who I was. So you know that was great to know that she had that flexibility, you know and concern.

Flexibility involved not penalizing students academically when life circumstances intervened. A student at another institution described how grateful he was for one of his instructors who gently confronted him about his performance in class when he was experiencing a life crisis:

I had a professor this semester, he was pretty cool... Like something happened in my personal life that was it was pretty like – like put me down completely with school, and I just stopped showing up to his class because it was every Friday. And he finally sent me a text message because he asked us for our e-mail, and for our phone numbers. And he just basically, overall, he's saying, 'When are you gonna take responsibility

for yourself, and just start showing up?’ And I said, ‘What do you mean?’ He said, ‘Well, I know what happened because I have friends in the class. I know what’s going on. You just need to cut that crap, and come to class.’ So I start showing up in class, and he gave me all like extra time to complete the project and stuff... Instead of a D, I have a B in this class. And I’m probably gonna end with an A.

The faculty member’s flexibility in allowing the student to complete assignments in combination with his willingness to confront the student’s problem head on facilitated the student’s eventual success in the course. In addition to accommodating faculty, students also appreciated faculty who exuded energy and humor in the classroom.

Energetic Faculty

Students valued faculty who were lively and vivacious. In a humorous exchange, a student joked about such a faculty member with the focus group moderator:

Student 1: I had a teacher... And he was just like super bouncy, and like if you raised your hand and answered a question or something, he’d be like, ‘You get extra credit, and you get extra credit.’

Moderator: It’s like Oprah.

Student 1: Yeah. Yeah. Exactly.

Moderator: You get a car.

Student 1: Yeah. Yeah.... He was a great teacher. I mean, he could get sidetracked a little. Like he’d just start going on about like a good ice cream place. [Laughter].

A student at another institution described her favorite professor as being “energetic.” As a result, students all vie to enroll in her class. The student explained:

We love her. Every student wants to be in her class. She makes sure that everybody knows that it’s important. And she will tell you all the time, ‘You are wonderful.’ And you cannot wait to go to that class to show that you do care and you took her advice and you try your best and look, your paper turned to be one of the best of it. So in my words that [energetic] is what a good professor is.

Though positive assessments of faculty were more prevalent in the data, students also frequently mentioned instructor traits that they found unhelpful to their learning processes.

Indifferent Faculty

While faculty members described as being accessible, supportive, accommodating, and energetic received praise, students were critical of faculty they believed were not committed to their success. Often this involved faculty whom students believed were rigid about course expectations or were exerting minimal effort on students’ behalf. Two students described a faculty member they had both encountered on campus:

Student 1: I ended up with a teacher that I just didn’t really like. She was very – she just felt very snippy at times. She didn’t really like – we couldn’t really ask when stuff was due because she would always be like it’s online, check there, if we were just making sure about something, or like just – she there for questions, but other than that, she was just kind of there to do her lecture, grade her papers, and that was it....

Student 2: I bet we had the same one. Yeah, because she wasn’t the greatest.

Student 1: She was horrible.

Moderator: What did you not like about that teacher?

Student 2: Besides the fact that she was rude sometimes, she seemed to pick favorites in the class, and only help those people. And then...

Student 1: Yep, it's gotta be the same teacher.

Student 2: Yeah. And then if you went up to her, or say, you know, I missed a couple days – I mean, I probably missed like four days of class from being sick, and, you know, I asked what I could do to make up for it, and she was not there to help me for that at all. She didn't care. You know, she thought that since I was gone, that, you know, I didn't matter. Like I missed it, and all that sort of thing.... If you asked for help, she'd be like 'You can do it. You can do it on your own. You don't need my help.'

Student 1: Yeah, 'You did it the other day.' 'I know, but I was on a roll that day.' But I would forget probably one step, you know, the signs or whatever, and I sat there the entire class until I just picked up my stuff, and I just left.

One of the students in the exchange was so demotivated by the instructors' unwillingness to help that she left class early. Another student encountered an indifferent faculty member in an online class. The student explained:

...They should tell you that the online classes... most of the work is just on a computer, so the professor I had didn't teach. And I needed to be taught. So the first day, she says, 'Hi, my name is Professor such and such, and I'm not here to teach. I'm here just to make sure you show up. Oh. 'And if this is not right fit for you, then you need to leave.' I didn't know what I was supposed to do with

that. You know, I don't want to leave and look like I don't know what I'm doing, but it seemed like they should tell you that all your assignments are gonna be basically on a computer, and this certain teacher doesn't teach.... Yeah, that was horrible because I was two seconds from crying...

The student was surprised and deflated not only by the online course content, but also by the faculty member's minimal role in teaching the class.

Though infrequent, some students cited faculty members' poor communication skills as detrimental to their learning process. One student remarked, "You know I have to understand what you're saying for this to work." Another student described doing poorly in MAT 1033 due to his inability to understand the instructor: "and then when I transferred to my new MAT 1033 class, the exact same thing happened and I almost failed the class because I couldn't understand anything they [the instructor] were saying."

Other students were demotivated by faculty with negative messages about students' ability to succeed in coursework. A student at another institution described such a professor:

I had a professor tell me, 'If you have more than two classes with me you should drop the classes because you're not gonna make it.' So I'm like, 'How is that positive? How can you tell us that we're not good enough already to take more courses?' So that's what I mean by positive professors saying, 'Yes, you can do it. Yes, you're wonderful.' And maybe some people say, 'Oh, she just says that.' But you feel when a teacher really means it.

Beyond negativity, other students cited faculty they found to be rude or impatient in the classroom.

A student described her dealings with such a faculty member:

I've also had a bad experience with one of my professors...It didn't feel like she was really there for me like at all. Like, I still passed her class, but it was just I felt that I was, at some point, either – I don't think I was graded unfairly that much. My writing needs a lot of work, so I think that was probably most of it. But I feel like she was very sassy to people who didn't really deserve it, so I just had a bad experience with that pretty much is the only one.

Luckily, this student described her negative interactions with one particular faculty member as the only discouraging experience she'd ever had with faculty in her academic career thus far.

Other Instructional Staff Members

Students didn't just comment on their instructors. They also noted how essential tutors and support staff were to their learning. One student explained how lost she would be without the assistance of tutors:

I've had the tutors everywhere. And my problem is I get in front of the tutors and when they tell me, I'm like, 'Oh, that makes sense.' And I walk out the door and I left it in the room with them. Because just – now I'm like a squirrel. I don't know what I'm doing. And I look at it and I'm just, you know staring at it and I'm saying, 'Okay, um.' But now I have access to somebody at any given point in time. I can call her up and I can say, 'Okay, this is what I'm dealing with....The tutors are great. But I need them to go in the room with me. I need them everywhere I go....

Similarly, another student described the help she received from the learning center staff:

And do have a great support on the [location of learning center]. Without them I would be desperate. They reach out so many hours. I think I could open a business over there by being every day there for at least somewhere between two to three hours per day. They are wonderful. So, so nice people.

After having examined student perspectives on the curriculum and instructional staff, we now consider student identities and academic success under SB 1720.

Section Eight: Diverse Student Populations and Academic Success

Community colleges provide access to higher education for diverse student populations. These populations encounter threats to their academic success at FCS institutions associated with their identities. Some common threats include financial concerns, lack of knowledge about college, academic under-preparedness, and multiple and competing priorities. In this section, we provide a glimpse into the lives of economically disadvantaged students, first-generation students, immigrant and English Language Learners, veterans, and returning adult students.

ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

Community colleges have often been referred to as “democracy’s colleges” (Boggs, 2012) because they provide both educational opportunity and economic mobility for so many students (Nix et al., 2016). A faculty member provided a similar sentiment, stating that community college students are “...coming to try to break that cycle of poverty and illiteracy.” An administrator expressed the sentiment that SB 1720 was altering the traditional democratizing mission of the community college in Florida:

When I got into education and I got into working in colleges, it became very clear to me, and especially in community colleges, how many students simply needed a leg up to get out of the economic hole that most of them are in when they’re poor and uneducated. Community colleges provide an opportunity to give students a chance. Senate Bill 1720 pretty much destroyed that chance for an awful lot of people.

He went on to share his family and professional experience with DE and its role in fulfilling the core community college mission:

I had a niece, for example, dropped out of school at 16. She called me up one day. She had three kids, no husband, needed to get an education. She couldn’t write, she couldn’t read, she couldn’t do anything, but she’s smart. Life had messed her up. I sent her to the local community college in our home town in Florida. They put her through developmental ed. She graduated with honors, went on and got a great job. Never would have happened if it weren’t for a community college and developmental education, I could tell you another thousand stories that are very similar.

Under-resourced Schools

A prominent theme in our data was that many students in the FCS, particularly economically disadvantaged students, attended under-resourced, failing K-12 schools prior to enrolling in college. Thus, part of the purpose of DE, from the perspective of campus personnel, was to ameliorate the lack of educational opportunity in students’ previous schooling experiences. A faculty member described her dismay at what she perceived as the unfairness of the legislation:

I am concerned when all the senate bill activities went through, because of my experience in high school and adult education and dev ed. And our population has under-served school systems. Or ones that have come in with these low-level skills. You have people from a community that may

have never left the community. Maybe they have never driven outside the Florida line. And you're now saying to them, "We're even going to cut your services to the bone and we're going to expect you to achieve against the student who's had all the benefits." And to me, as a society, when we first came about, we were come-as-we-are-and-we-will-move-you. And now it's changed.

A faculty member at another institution described the extent of the academic deficits that economically disadvantaged students brought with them to her institution:

And unfortunately, one of our three service districts is [name redacted], which has one of the worst school systems in the state. So, you know, a good bit of our population comes from there and the state assumes that they are college-ready, and the reality of that is, I've had the valedictorian from what was once [name redacted] in my developmental math course.

Given the socioeconomic status of many FCS students, focus group participants universally agreed that financial aid is of paramount importance to students' ability to pursue higher education, particularly for economically disadvantaged students.

FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS

Many economically disadvantaged students are also first-generation students (Pike & Kuh, 2005). These students are the first, or in the first group, of their families to attend college and/or complete degree programs in higher education. At FCS institutions these students contend with access, retention, and completion obstacles given a lack of prior knowledge, capital, and socialization. Unfortunately, for many, they

enroll in college with less awareness of typical college activities and expectations as well. In discussing first-generation students, a faculty member at one institution explained, "...So being the first-generation in college, they don't have anyone they can actually ask to say what are the steps I need to do now or what are the different options I have..." Faculty at other institutions underlined these sentiments. Another instructor remarked:

We know they're first-generation. They may not have anyone at home that knows that went to college or has a college experience. They have no support system. A lot of them are GED or they didn't even go to a regular traditional high school. Their academic knowledge is so little. So we really have been pushing and pushing. Give them some kind of support...

Some campus personnel, however, feel that given recent changes to DE policy, first-generation students now have greater threats to retention. One instructor described the challenge that arises as students who do not have the prior knowledge for college make decisions without all of the requisite information:

...because many of our students are first-generation in college and....they usually don't have backup from home either, but they're trying to get to a different level. And when they come in here and they're allowed to make these life-altering decisions at – against better judgment – ...then they get discouraged and they quit. They just stop coming.

Fortunately, in our focus groups campus personnel show awareness for the unique needs of this student population and discussed their motivation to provide support for these students. Many campus personnel

themselves shared with us their own stories of being first in their families to attend college and the challenges they personally experienced. An advisor recounted her journey, highlighting the ways she uses her own experience to encourage and support students at her institution.

But now all of these years later I know what it takes... It's about how I study and how I prepare. And so I've had my ups and downs...and I share those with students all the time. I'm like, 'Believe me, you have to stay in that tutoring lab.' ...every day I left class I went straight to the tutoring lab. There's no point in me going home, as a first-generation college student nobody at my house knows anything about what I am talking about so they cannot help me.

Student descriptions of their status as the first in college ranged from "excited" to "proud" and "pressure[d]." Despite the lack of personal prior experience, students in our focus groups responded positively to the parental advice they received, even in the absence of their parents' understanding of the college experience. One first-generation student remarked that family advised her, "You work hard enough and you can achieve what you want. You know, always having a positive outlook and always being courageous." Other students described the ways that their families encourage them, but are unable to provide key information about college in general.

Family Support

In some cases first-generation students had familial figures or models outside of parents, providing support and advisement. The guidance from fictive kinship, surrogate familial figures, is particularly useful to them in maneuvering college. In an atypical

circumstance, an older adult student spoke of guidance from younger siblings who attended college:

I'm the oldest of five kids, my four younger siblings all been through college. ...They just said to stay focused. Stay focused and just don't take on a course load, don't take on more classes that what you think you can handle, and just stay focused until you get caught up on your work.

Overall, students associated the support from their families as both motivation and pressure, acknowledging the sacrifices made by their families so they could attend college. For example, a student shared:

It's very overwhelming because, you know, I am the youngest, but also because I'm the only one that actually went to college. It's like I don't want to upset my mom. So it's yeah, trying to make sure I stay on track and get through what I need to get through, not only for myself, but for her.

Focus group participants frequently identified parents as their motivation for attending college. Several students told us that going to college was an 'expectation' and that not going to college was never an option because their parents communicated college-going aspirations to them often. One student described parental expectations like this, "Oh, you're going to college –it's just a matter of where you're going and when you're going." A second student said "It was just an expectation. There wasn't, there was not really a – you're going." Students were happy to comply with their parents' wishes but felt pressured to do well. A student revealed "They want [me] to declare a major, and they put a lot of pressure on me...I feel like I need to declare something ...I don't know what I want to do. But they also support me a lot." Another

student lamented “They push you. Like don’t fall off, or like make any mistake....They’re like...make sure you finish. Okay. I’ll finish”.

IMMIGRANT STUDENTS AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

SB 1720 had the effect of creating two classes of students, exempt and non-exempt in FCS institutions. *Exempt* students could opt out of DE while *non-exempt* students could not. The legislation had the unintended consequence of placing some students in an ambiguous space because the bill was unclear in some instances. An administrator pointed out:

It’s starting from ninth and completed the high school in the four consecutive years or not, because basically you can start ninth grade, right, and then they – you leave – I had a student that they left the country and they came back in tenth or – and they completed it, right? So it’s a little vague, that policy that stated that way – I don’t know. But yes, we need more clarification in terms of the policy.

This ambiguity affects international and English Language Learners (ELL) students who graduated from Florida public high schools in unexpected ways enabling them to bypass DE as well. An FCS administrator explained the uncertainty:

We have a big population of immigrant students here. And so they go through the whole ESL program here and they graduate from high school with a standard diploma. And then they come here and their English level is very basic. But as a policy we can’t make them take the test, and so they go into ENC 1101, and I’ve seen it, and they just flat-out fail the class. And so then they have to come back, or sometimes a professor will send

them to the advisor and say, “You know, speak to this student.” And I’ll have a conversation with the student and say, “Hey, you may have to take the TOEFL test, you know, because English is your second language and we feel like you’re not doing well enough in these classes, and we don’t want you” – like, I had a student, she just refused – take the class, took it over and over and over again, until finally she tapped out. And then finally she – I had to really talk to her, and I had to – because I speak Creole. I had to speak to her in Creole to explain to her that, look, you are not going to pass this English level class. And then – so she – when she finally – okay, and she went and took the test. And so, you know, that’s the challenge, you know, with this bill. Check they actually graduated from high school. So that’s how those EAP students actually – we lose them . . . They actually ended up being exempt when they should be actually non-exempt. So sometimes they’re caught and sometimes they’re not.

For students who immigrated to the United States as children or young adults but for whom English is not the primary language spoken at home, high school matriculation may not have adequately prepared them for college-level work. An administrator at an FCS institution pointed out:

We’re assuming that every high school is giving them the same education and every student is receiving the same education. We can look at just statistics of pushing students through, coming out of school not having the reading level . . . I was only an advisor in the assessment center when it came out [SB 1720], and I thought it was the worst news I can hear. Because I’m an English graduate, and that’s the first thing I thought of: there’s not gonna be a student out there that’s gonna say ‘I

can't read or write.' Because here they are. They've gone as far as making an appointment; they've gone as far as applying to the college. It's gonna be hard to tell an English-speaking student that they can't read or write.

Challenges Faced by Immigrant Students and English Language Learners

Like many of their U.S. counterparts, numerous international and immigrant students, begin their college career at community colleges. For some it is their first time in college, for others who previously earned college degrees in their home countries and have found that the credentials are not recognized in the United States, it means starting over. Regardless, these students face challenges adjusting to the culture of a new country and a new college environment.

Language was the most common difficulty experienced by these students in the FCS institutions we visited. Many of these students lack proficiency in reading and writing English, though they spoke English well. A student shared her frustration with having to enroll in separate courses from the other students because of her English proficiency. She lamented:

The only thing that probably impacts me to choose what I would like it for elective is being an English as a second language that it's taking away from us because we are put in this program where we have to learn intensive English in order to be able to perform at the college level.

Campus personnel agreed that international and immigrant students had to overcome many obstacles with learning English to do well in college. In fact, the demographics of the developmental reading classes on one campus had shifted from underprepared

students to mostly English Language Learners (ELL). Faculty, however, portrayed these students as "motivated." A faculty member at an FCS institution said, "I mean a – a lot of the students I have now are ESL, out of state, or older, and you know, a lot of those people have really good attitudes, actually." Another faculty member shared a poignant story about an international student:

The girl who when she was seven, her parents – they were smuggled out of Mexico, and how they almost died. And she couldn't speak English when she got here. She graduated with a 4.0 from high school, and now she's here at college.

Like many students at community colleges, one student articulated difficulties not with English but with math. He was surprised that he needed to enroll in developmental math but realized how he benefited from the course. The student stated:

I did take Math 0028. At the beginning, I was frustrated because one of the things in my country is, you know math. Math doesn't need translations. For English, yes, I need to learn. But for math I thought it's going to be very easy for me. But I find out that American math actually has few different ways of resolving situations. It's not the same as I was taught in my country. And yes, I graduated in 1988, so that was more than 30 years from that time. And because I had a good foundation [sic] for my country it helped to go smoothly with my math. But I was glad I took it. Because it gave me the foundations for what [was] needed later on.

Academic and Other Support Services

International and immigrant students acknowledged their struggles with coursework and noted that they normally took advantage of campus resources to help them improve their assignments and meet faculty

expectations. One student described using academic support services at his campus:

It's like a building. If you don't have a strong foundations [sic] then you may be able to build one level or two level, but then it's gonna fall apart. So, I do appreciate that. And do have a great support on the third floor at learning center. Without them I would be desperate. They reach out so many hours. I think I could open a business over there by being every day there for at least somewhere between two to three hours per day. They are wonderful. So, so nice people.

Students felt that not all programs created to assist worked effectively. One domestic student told us that she and other domestic students not involved in the program were often intermediaries for international students attempting to navigate the institution. She explained:

It's usually Haitian students or Spanish students who are in that program, and they get the runaround so often. They don't know what they're doing. They get sent to admissions. They get sent to student life. Sometimes they don't have their student numbers activated into the system, so they have to wait two and three weeks to get their ID's. The Project Renew students in general, they don't have any guidance. They don't know what they're doing, so they're being sent to different apartments when they should be sent to one department, and that department, they don't know it exists until we take them there, we walk them there.

Administrators bemoaned that some programs that catered to international and ELL learners had been cut. One institutional leader explained what happened

when the reading lab and a reading tutor were eliminated due to budget cuts:

So, there is a tutor in the EAP lab, but at least my feedback from my students, the feedback is that the tutor's not the same caliber because it's more like a general tutor that maybe doesn't specialize in reading. Then we teach language learners here at the college. We were providing training for that because many of our students who have finished high school, they don't necessarily complete the ESL program, and they enrolled into 1101.

VETERANS

Our data suggest that veterans and active-duty military have different experiences in college, depending on the institution in which they are enrolled. Students at two different colleges praised services designed specifically to support student veterans. At one, a student made mention of the Student Veterans of America organization and the engagement they facilitated:

When I was going through my rough time the Student Veterans of America kind of helped me... We have different community projects.... I helped with this activity and this activity, because giving back was my mental way of relief. We did a Martin Luther King project. Got to help spend time with some of the veterans in the [assisted living facility]—different service projects—I'm also a member of Mission United, Relay for life.

At another institution, a student spoke highly of services provided by the Veteran's Center.

That's another thing about here and in the Veterans' Center. They always, they do—they have things where it's like, for the veterans who have

service dogs with them, they have a free class where anybody can bring their dog and they show them how to train their dogs, just like the service dogs. Boots for Paws, that's what it's called. So we do that, and then they also have this hot wing contest where, you know, it's like \$5.00 for a ticket, and then you meet at a location and there's just an abundance of different kinds of hot wings, all you can eat, just show up with a ticket.

While not a specific organization, another veteran described the support from other student veterans that helped him through a rough time. He told us:

But, I found out when I was going through—when I dislocated my shoulder and I had to refocus, I was going through a hard time. I found the support of other veterans to be very—who were going through to be very—because I wasn't working. My disability ran out. I was 54 at that time living off of my wife's social security and my brother-in-law's from the family trust. I was living—someone else was supporting me and you know how most men are. At that age to have someone else support you, it's mentally and physically degrading. They helped me get through that rough part of my life. So, I guess I'm saying they did influence me, because they encouraged me to go on.

Faculty and staff at other institutions worried they were not providing enough support to this student population. For instance, one advisor brought attention to a gap in online DE course offerings:

The one hole we have is we don't have online options for students... We have students that don't do developmental just because there is nothing for them to do online, and they just can't come in. Maybe they're military, and they're in

Iraq or Afghanistan. Maybe they live in another state. You know, it could be any number of things. But they'll skip developmental... They might do developmental, you know, if we had an option for them.

A few respondents expressed concern about the ability of students utilizing the GI Bill to afford DE courses, even when they might benefit from additional academic support. To this point, a faculty member complained, "[DE courses] aren't covered. Like if they – whether they want it or not, their military funding doesn't cover it." An advisor at another college reflected:

With our VA students... Even when they want to take it [DE], it's just, "Well, they're not going to cover this," so then they'll be more inclined to go ahead and jump into that next math... That does work against our veteran students because they won't cover them.

One advisor identified the many aspects of student life, including academic success, housing, and financial aid, that are impacted by the military provision of SB 1720:

I work mostly with veteran students. These guys, if we put them in remedials when they have the exemption, they don't get their housing benefits, they don't have their classes paid. So I have to be twice as careful with them, I would say, as an advisor. At the end of the day, the key is that they have the option to get out of the remediation which can have some really negative effects, from getting bad grades to getting in a bad standing with the school, losing their financial aid.

In spite of these concerns, several student veterans recognized that DE courses were valuable, even when having to pay out of pocket for them. Because many veterans choose to serve shortly after graduating high school, this is a common plight. Speaking about the limitations of the GI Bill, one student stated:

The first thing that we understand in the military is that there's a lot of things that we go and do when we're active duty that's not covered. [Laughter] You know, but we understand... It starts and ends with us. Either we go there [into DE] and do the work that we're supposed to do and everything will work out great, [or] we don't, then you don't. But you really do need these courses if you have not done it in a long time.

Another student veteran added, "I had a 10 year gap between education. I got my GED when I was 19, and I went back to college when I was 29, so I'm glad I went through them [DE courses] again."

RETURNING ADULT STUDENTS

Many of the student populations we have discussed thus far are also returning adult students. These students make up a large majority of FCS institution students and experience all of the challenges we have identified thus far, plus a few more of their own. Since SB 1720, campus personnel have observed the changing student composition of many DE courses. A faculty member explained:

The change in the population that I've seen, they are older. They have been out of school in some cases for ten or more years. They're coming back because they are now at a point in their life where they need to make a change. They're trying to improve themselves. Changing careers. All of those

things. Because they've been out of school so long they are required to take the developmental course and very rarely do I see a student in my class that doesn't need the course. There are occasionally a few that I will come across that tend to be younger that are in the course because they took the placement test and did poorly on the placement test.

Faculty also explained that because older adult students possess a higher level of self-awareness than recent high school graduates, they make sounder decisions regarding their education. She explained:

If you get someone that's been out of school 10, 20, 30, 40 years and they'll say, "Ya' know what? I was one point and they said you could take this or this." They always opt to take the lower because they understand. They're adults. They understand. They can recognize that they don't have the skills. I wish they would put an age requirement. That you have to be over 25 to choose your own courses or not you have to listen to the advisor, but it really is a huge difference.

This faculty member concluded that older students were better able to prepare themselves for what they would experience. She noted, "...the older student sometimes is more mature, is able to handle what they need to do to prep themselves whereas the younger students don't realize that."

Adult Students and Advising

Many adult students in our focus groups described visiting advisors for initial advising and then using other sources to support their decision-making for subsequent situations. One student explained how she self-advised after changing majors.

I guess in the beginning of my college life I saw advisors more frequently because I had no idea what I was doing. I wasn't sure which major I was choosing. I was back and forth between dental hygiene, nursing. Now I'm totally doing a different one, supervision and management, and it all comes down to why. It's because I got pregnant and then I had to change my major. So it was just a complete mess. So I did seek advisors' opinions more in the beginning, than more so now. Now that I know exactly what I'm doing, I'll visit my advisor maybe once a semester or contact him via e-mail.

Another student identified going to faculty for course recommendations. He explained:

I go with the recommendation of the professor. Where I needed to—the one course he told me to take, it wasn't available, so I just said what other course could I take besides that, because it's not available. So, I selected another one. That's when I looked up the course description and I saw there was International Marketing. I signed up for it. Then I emailed my professor saying, 'The course wasn't available. I selected this course.' He said that's an excellent choice to change it to. So actually, I haven't—as an older student you can do it, basically, on your own without a lot of help.

Balancing Competing Priorities

Faculty at FCS institutions acknowledge that students returning to school balance multiple priorities and this impacts students' ability to not only make better decisions regarding their education, but also can impede students' ability to take advantage of academic supports, reiterating the importance of accurate course placement. This instructor explained:

But the nature of what – you know, of our college students, our community college students, is they come to campus to take classes and then they leave because they have jobs and families and such outside of here, so it's not like a traditional four-year institution person who goes to school to go to school. They're coming out here and they have a host of other things to take care of. So some of those support services are lost simply because they don't have the time to do that, but if placed in the correct course where they can be successful, they'll have a much better chance of getting through that class.

In our discussions with returning adult students the subject of balancing those multiple roles emerged. The exchange between one of our researchers and a student during an interview highlights many of the roles the students serves at school, home, and in the community:

Moderator: Do you find it difficult to balance the school obligations and work obligations?

Student: Sometimes, but a lot of time at work I study, if it's quiet, I can do some homework while I'm sitting there in between.

Moderator: Do you have family obligations, as well?

Student: Yes. I have a wife. We do things together and sometimes that can be a bit of a challenge, because she wants to do something and I really can't do it, because between work, the work study, school, college work, and other volunteering.

Moderator: It's a lot to balance.

Student: It's a lot to balance, but I somehow manage.

In our focus groups, we heard stories of adult students who were also parents and caregivers deciding to return to college. These students were often retooling to enter new careers or preparing to enter the workforce for the first time after spending many years as primary caregivers. In doing so, parents were challenged to “keep up” with modern technology, stay on top of coursework, all while being attentive to their children.

While these students noted that they took many criteria into consideration when choosing classes, they frequently noted that fitting courses into their families’ schedules was a priority. One immigrant student disclosed her course-taking strategy:

To be honest, I’m not very picky with what I choose because I was told that an associate in arts there are certain things you don’t really have too much flexibility. There’s certain things you have to take it in order for you to be able to transfer to a university. So right now I’m doing there what is required. When it comes to a professor, yeah, I may be a little bit picky and look into it to see which one is more opened, flexibility. Also the time. It’s very important for me because I am a mother. I have two kids waiting on me. And I’m trying to do my courses when they are in school in order for me to be able to do my motherly needs when they come home.

Students who were also parents described not having the time to devote to be “present” as a student: academically, professional, *and* socially. For example, one student explained:

The clubs and stuff, if I was younger, I would be interested in, but since I’m not as young any more, I can’t really go off of what makes me happy and things that I can relate to, unless they had one for parents. [Laughter] Then we could go, but...other than that...

Within our data, grandparents (and some distant family members) were seen as sources of support for student-parents. For example, student-parents consistently relayed stories about the “push” from their families to pursue their education. One student stated, “Neither one of my parents attended college, but my aunt and my uncle, who I look up to did. And I always had to prioritize, to study, ask questions and work hard.”

Many returning adult students balance work and school throughout the time it takes to complete their degrees. Often students must choose to prioritize one over the other with consequences. The student we interviewed had been enrolled for six years working on his degree. He recounted a discussion with his employer and the choice he made regarding his education:

After six years. My boss always says, ‘You can’t take a Saturday course. We need you Saturday. You have a Monday night course at 6:30PM. You supposed to work till 6:00PM, so you need to leave at 5:15PM, but that’s when it’s busy. He’s [fellow employee] gonna be all by himself.’ This is my last semester. I’m sorry. There’s no negotiating on my college schedule. That’s when you know an employer is out [to] get the job done and they don’t care about your personal growth.

Many adults returning to school after time away have a variety of life experiences that brought them to college for the first time, or contributed to the delay they experienced in their education. These rich life situations serve to enhance their and other students’ classroom experiences. Throughout our visits to FCS institutions we heard stories of students’ noteworthy resilience and determination. The vignettes presented here highlight both students’ lived experiences and the ways that FCS institutions are shaped by these students.

An advisor who also teaches classes at her institution shared the story of one student who had been incarcerated for three years prior to enrolling in college. She explained:

I have students that often, you know, a student in my studio the other day, we were reading *Prison Studies* by Malcom X, that he taught himself to read in prison, and blah, blah, blah. We were talking about how can you link personal, you know, we were talking annotating, and how you can – if you want to do a response, [name redacted], he goes, ‘Well, for me,’– I didn’t know what he was talking about at first; he goes, ‘For me, it was thesaurus.’ And I go, ‘what do you mean?’ He goes, ‘Well, I didn’t copy the dictionary when I was in prison; I copied the thesaurus.’

This kid is like low-twenties, you know, and he had been in prison for three years for selling drugs, and, you know, told his story on how he was so excited to have read this. He goes, ‘I didn’t ever read this. Like but I did something very similar’ you know, trying to teach himself.

Another advisor described the situation of her daughter at an FCS institution. The exchange below between her and another advisor demonstrate the student’s resilience, but also attests to the positive influence of the support provided by both parents and campus personnel.

Advisor 1: I have a personal one. My daughter came back after – out of high school, she started school. She got pregnant. She failed all of her classes. She had a couple semesters. [name redacted] actually advised her. And she was scared to death of math. And, you know, being [campus personnel], I was harping on her to use the Academic Support Center. And she did. And she did well on her math classes. She spent a lot of

time in there doing math in the academic support center. And then later on, she became friends with her English teacher. And her English teacher liked her writing, so she became a Writing Fellow.

Advisor 2: And now she has her AA degree with a 3.8, and she’s finishing her paralegal this semester. And she’s going to [institution redacted] to be an English literature major. She wants to teach English. But she –...she used every service we have. I mean she would...

Advisor 3: Well, the thing with her, and I think it’s with a lot of students that are coming back who have overcome something, they are so lacking confidence. And so the only thing I gave [name redacted] out of our 45 minutes together that day was, you know what, you’re not a bad writer. You’re not bad at all. I’m gonna cry. Sorry. She’s a dear friend now, and I’ve watched her just like blossom into this like young professional. So she got to leave that day with like, okay, I’m not awful. I can do this. And then she became a tutor for us. So she went from being on the – I mean that happens, but like to see it, it was really cool.

Advisor 1: Yeah, and they don’t listen to their mother. [Laughter]. You know, I could tell her she’s [inaudible] do it forever. But she came to me, and she said, ‘Mom, I don’t understand why any student fails math at [institution redacted]. There are plenty services available. They just have to use them.’ And I was like, wow, that’s – you know. So I tried to stay out of her business and let her do her thing. [Laughter]

And in the beginning, I pushed a little bit, but mostly I – then she’d come and ask for – usually [name redacted] would advise her, or [name redacted] would advise her. But yeah, she’s – all these people helped.

Conclusion

Our site visits confirm that institutions have made significant changes on the ground to support student success; however, considerable challenges remain. Campus personnel highlighted improved collaboration and coordination as positive byproducts of the legislation, but continued to express concern about the financial challenges associated with the legislation, the success rates of underprepared students enrolled in gateway courses, and the effects of the legislation on student populations such as economically disadvantaged students, first generation students, immigrants and English Language Learners, veterans, and returning adult students. Regardless of their backgrounds, all students reinforced the central importance of both advisors and faculty to their

success in state colleges. However, student reactions to DE and gateway curriculum as well as advising processes were mixed.

The findings in this statewide report were based on focus groups with administrators, faculty members, advisors, support staff, and students during our visits to nine FCS institutions. In addition, the CPS team will continue to analyze student data to examine student outcomes over time, document the changes in institutional programs and practices, and study the interrelations among state policy change, institutional transformation, and student success in postsecondary education.

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