

Transition Courses: Building a Bridge to College Success

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Too many students are deemed unprepared when entering college

Students designated as unprepared for college-level coursework are often placed into non-credit-bearing remedial courses. In 2015/16, the following percentages of first-year undergraduates enrolled in a remedial course:¹

43% of all students

49% of Black students

48% of Latino students

Remedial courses can pose significant barriers for students

Remedial coursework, which often comprises lengthy sequences and cannot be applied toward a college degree, has been shown to:²



Reduce college persistence



Lengthen the time and cost of postsecondary studies

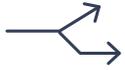


Prevent college graduation

Transition curricula are a promising strategy for preparing students for college and reducing the need for remedial education

What are transition courses? Transition curricula are typically full-year high school courses taken by students who are at risk of being placed into remedial classes when they enroll in college. Transition curricula generally:³

- Are informed by Common Core and statewide K-12 content standards
- Align with expectations for college coursework in terms of volume and rigor
- Address non-cognitive aspects of college preparation such as goal setting, admission processes, and motivation to attend college
- Incorporate contemporary topics that are engaging and relevant to students' lives



Emerging research shows that transition courses prepare students for postsecondary study and reduce placement in remedial courses

Transition courses are offered in 39 states, 17 of which have statewide transition curricula. Other programs are offered locally through individual colleges or school districts.⁴



Expository Reading and Writing Curriculum (ERWC)

State: California

Outcomes: Students in the ERWC scored higher than non-ERWC students on the California State University (CSU) English Placement Test, used to determine eligibility for credit-bearing college English courses. (See box for more about the ERWC.)⁵

➔ <https://writing.csusuccess.org/>



College and Career Readiness Initiative (FCCRI) transition courses

State: Florida

Outcomes: Among students who scored in the midrange on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, those who took FCCRI transition courses had a higher likelihood of enrolling in non-remedial courses in college compared with students who did not participate in FCCRI transition courses.⁶

➔ <http://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/3/urllt/fyi2010-04.pdf>



Literacy Ready

State: Southern Regional Education Board

Outcomes: Completing the Literacy Ready program was associated with improvement in ACT scores in English and Science, as well as overall ACT score, from 2015 to 2016.⁷

➔ <https://www.sreb.org/literacy-ready>



Seamless Alignment and Integrated Learning Support (SAILS)

State: Tennessee

Outcomes: Since Seamless Alignment and Integrated Learning Support (SAILS) Math was implemented in 2012, there has been a decrease in the percentage of students statewide entering community college needing math remediation. In the Fall of 2011, 71.1% of students entering community colleges required math remediation whereas in the Fall of 2018, only 57.4% required remediation, a difference of 13.7 percentage points since the beginning of implementation.

➔ <https://www.tn.gov/thec/bureaus/academic-affairs-and-student-success/academic-programs/sails.html>



Bridge to College (BtC) transition courses in math and English language arts (ELA)

State: Washington

Outcomes: Students taking BtC math were more likely to enroll in college-level math than their comparison group peers (39% versus 27% enrollment rates). 31% of BtC ELA students who scored at Level 2 on their 11th grade ELA Smarter Balanced Assessment earned an "A" in their first college-level English course, while 22% of their comparison peers earned an "A."⁸

➔ <https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/graduation/transition-postsecondary-education/bridge-college-courses>



A closer look: California's Expository Reading and Writing Curriculum

Collaboratively designed by CSU faculty, high school English language arts teachers, and K-12 administrators, this course aims to improve the academic literacy of high school seniors so they can avoid remedial English and enter credit-bearing coursework at the CSU. The ERWC:

- Emphasizes in-depth study of expository, analytical, and argumentative reading and writing
- Engages students through high-interest topics such as immigration, mental illness, and social-media usage
- Empowers students to express themselves through academic discourse and extensive writing



I've learned a lot of critical thinking skills. My teacher really makes us think in depth and discuss everything that we do.

— ERWC student

1 U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. (2018). *Percentage of first-year undergraduate students who reported taking remedial education courses, by selected student and institution characteristics: Selected years, 2003–04 through 2015–16*. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18_311.40.asp?current=yes

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4 Fay, M. P., Barnett, E. A., & Chavarin, O. (2017). *How states are implementing transition curricula: Results from a national scan*. New York, NY: Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center. Retrieved from <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/ccrc-research-brief-how-states-implementing-transition-curricula-results-national-scan.pdf>

5 Fong, A., Finkelstein, N., Jaeger, L., Diaz, R., & Broek, M. (2015). *Evaluation of the expository reading and writing course: Findings from the Investing in Innovation development grant*. WestEd. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED559522.pdf>

6 Mokher, C. G., Leeds, D. M., & Harris, J. (2017). Adding it up: How the Florida college and career readiness initiative impacted developmental education. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analyses*, 40(2), 219–242. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.3102/0162373717744891>

7 The Tennessee Board of Regents. (2018). *Seamless Alignment and Integrated Learning Support (SAILS). Rethinking remediation, creating a pathway to postsecondary success*. Nashville, TN: Author. Available from <https://www.tbr.edu/academics/sails>

8 Baker, D., Mehlberg, S., & MacNeille, B. (2018). *College readiness math initiative: Bridge to College impact evaluation*. The Baker Group. <https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/curriculuminstruct/bridgetocollege/pubdocs/berc-impactreport.pdf>