

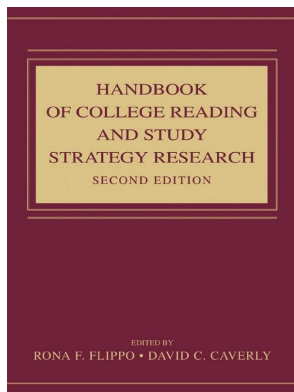
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AND STUDY
STRATEGY RESEARCH
SECOND EDITION

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3 Policy Issues

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A great deal of the social and economic success of the United States depends on how well it is able to educate its academically underprepared students. Federal policy makers urge higher education to meet the needs of a demanding workforce by providing skilled workers with higher levels of education. The recent U.S. Department of Education's (2006) "Spellings Report" explains:

In tomorrow's world a nation's wealth will derive from its capacity to educate, attract, and retain citizens who are able to work smarter and learn faster—making educational achievement ever more important both for individuals and for society writ large. (p. xiv)

At the same time, state governments are demanding more from their higher education systems by holding them accountable not only for enrollment, but also for degree completion. As the racial and ethnic diversity of the population grows—particularly with potential increases in the number of states having a majority of citizens who are people of color—it is critical for the United States to provide access and success for the students who have traditionally and historically been underrepresented in colleges and universities across the nation.

Educational reports argue that readiness for college-level reading is "at its lowest point in more than a decade" (ACT, 2006, p. 2). While higher education leaders blame secondary school educators, elementary and secondary schools blame each other, as well as the students' parents. Remedial education, existing somewhere between secondary and postsecondary education, often becomes the policy scapegoat for educational inequalities and college underpreparedness, with neither sector accepting responsibility for it. Critics charge remedial education with wasting taxpayer dollars for a service that was already provided during high school. Further, college remediation is often perceived as a back alley to college, granting access to underprepared students who are often considered unqualified for a four-year institution. A glance at recent editorials and newspaper headlines across the United States illustrates this: "Remedial Education Flunks" and "Colleges Should Not Admit Unqualified." Students were said to be "playing catch up" and "bone-headed" while taxpayers are "paying double."

The proportion of students required to take at least one remedial course suggests there is a resurging academic and perhaps literary crisis in the United States, as indicated by entering college students who were inadequately prepared for college. Adelman (2004), for example, found that 40% of the high school class of 1992 took at least one remedial course during their academic college career. More than 63% of those who enrolled in two-year colleges were required to do so. These statistics, however, must be considered within an historical context.

Even a cursory review of the history of higher education reveals that concerns regarding underpreparedness and the perceived literacy crisis are not a new phenomenon. On the contrary, even the most prestigious colleges and universities accepted students who did not meet admissions standards throughout most of their history. These institutions not only admitted students considered underprepared, but also took on the responsibility of meeting these students' academic needs. In 1869, for example, Harvard president Charles W. Eliot advanced this view in his inaugural speech, maintaining that colleges are obligated to provide supplementary instruction to students whose elementary schools failed to provide them with the tools they needed to succeed in college (Spann, 2000).

Many of today's colleges and universities, however, appear ready to abandon their institutional commitment to serving students who do not meet increasing admissions standards. External and internal demands for excellence and efficiency within colleges and universities have often led to the neglect of students in need of remedial education. Colleges and universities therefore raise their admissions standards and seek to enroll students with the highest SAT scores. Students who cannot meet the admissions standards are potentially barred not only from the most selective schools, but also from many four-year institutions that use SAT averages of incoming freshman to increase their prestige. With this in mind, Astin (2000) argues that educating the underprepared student is "the most important educational problem" facing American higher education today (p. 130). Indeed, more than three-quarters of American colleges and universities offer remedial instruction.

The struggle for institutions to balance the two goals of access and educational quality (excellence) has a long history in higher education, and they are often portrayed as mutually exclusive goals. Placing the two against each other is an unnecessary exercise exhibited in statehouses, courtrooms, and university boardrooms across the nation. Recent critiques of college preparedness and remedial education are often central to the debates.

Remedial coursework is germane to the unending quest for equality in higher education because it helps to repair leaks in the higher education "pipeline." While it is perceived by some to be a necessary tool to promote equal opportunity, remedial education is often associated by the press and policy makers with a negative stigma that suggests students required to enroll in remediation are in some way "deficient" (Gandara & Maxwell-Jolly, 1999). Callan (2001) argued students requiring only short-term remedial assistance were actually perceived to have the same remedial needs as "functional illiterates." Ironically, most students needing remediation require only one or two courses (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006). Limited empirical research, however, leads many policy makers and public taxpayers to question the utility and benefits of remedial programs.

Remediation is just one part of a much larger, multifaceted process that theoretically provides the tools necessary for students to successfully complete a college degree. Remedial education is thus often regarded as a critical piece not in "fixing" the student but rather in fixing the academic pipeline. Course offerings and support services may begin to address social inequalities in elementary and secondary schools, college preparation and eligibility, admissions and enrollment, and degree completion. There are potential benefits after college as well in terms of employment, as a baccalaureate degree is increasingly viewed as key to social mobility.

Despite the need for remedial education and its purported significance, policy makers in several states revealed concerns regarding the cost and pervasiveness of college remediation. In fact, the need for remediation is often cited as the problem, yet policy solutions rarely address this fundamental aspect of the issue. In Virginia and Florida, for example, lawmakers argued college remediation duplicated skills that should have been learned in high school and was thus a waste of resources. In the mid-1990s, they

proposed to charge high schools for the true cost of “remediating” high school graduates at the college level. Eventually, both states reconsidered and decided instead to limit college remediation to community colleges. South Dakota legislators do not allocate any public funding, including financial aid, for the instruction of remedial coursework. At least eight other states or higher education systems have reduced or eliminated remedial education in baccalaureate degree programs. Many more have already contemplated similar actions. In California, for example, the California State University system limits the time a student may take remedial courses to one year and disenrolls students who require more time. In contrast, the City University of New York restricts remediation to its associate programs. Students whose placement exams suggest the need for remediation are thus prohibited from even entering a baccalaureate program. As other universities and states consider or will consider similar policies, remedial education’s position in higher education, as well as the role of postsecondary education in general, is called into question.

PURPOSE OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter examines the current policy environment for college remedial education. To illustrate the recent politicization of remediation and its implications for students and institutions, I use the City University of New York (CUNY). As one of the nation’s largest and most diverse public universities, CUNY offers important lessons for institutions struggling with providing access to higher education in a policy environment that increasingly demands accountability and efficiency. This chapter also reviews ways in which the institution and its curriculum responded to this shift in the higher education policy environment and how remediation helps colleges and universities meet student and institutional goals. I conclude by offering implications for policy and practice as well as specific avenues for future research. Before considering the politicization of remediation, however, it is important to first briefly review the history of college and its current status in American postsecondary education (see Stahl & King, this volume).

LEARNING FROM THE PAST

In 1879, Harvard admitted 50% of its first year students as conditional admits who also received academic support to be successful in their coursework (Casazza, 1999). In fact, most colleges provided a “sizable proportion of their curricula to preparatory or remedial courses” (Thelin, 2004, p. 96) to help develop academic skills. Of course today’s college campuses are more racially, ethnically, linguistically, and economically diverse than those of centuries past, yet concern regarding student preparation and expanded remedial courses and services should not be solely attributed to changing demographics. Indeed, it is a part of the mission and history of higher education to educate for the public good.

Harvard, for example, has provided tutoring to students since its inception in 1636. By the 1870s, Harvard had instituted entrance exams to respond to applicants’ “bad spelling, incorrectness as well as inelegance of expression in writing, [and] ignorance of the simplest rules of punctuation” (Wyatt, 1992, p. 12). When half of its incoming students failed the entrance exam, Harvard leaders blamed preparatory schools, grammar schools, teachers, students, and parents. Still, the University tinkered with admissions exams to allow access to students whose scores would otherwise exclude them from the college due to inadequate academic preparation (Karabel, 2005). Harvard, as well as other prestigious institutions such as Princeton and Yale, had to find ways to not

only admit, but educate students in need of academic support. In his 1869 inaugural address as President of Harvard College, Charles W. Eliot urged, “Whatever elementary instruction the schools fail to give, the college must supply” (Charles W. Eliot, “Inaugural Address as President of Harvard College, October 19, 1869).

Certainly, the history of remedial education is not limited to Harvard and other prestigious universities. Many of the colleges of the 19th century had low admissions standards that were still not met by entering students (Wyatt, 1992). By 1890, only 27 states had compulsory education, and most schools prepared students for life, not higher education. As a result, most colleges had to offer some type of preparatory services. During this same time period, fewer than 20% of the nearly 400 American higher education institutions were without a preparatory program (Wyatt). Approximately 40% of first-year college students participated in preparatory instruction (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000).

In the early 20th century, colleges began to pay more attention to college reading and study skills, offering handbooks, how-to study courses, and reading programs. By the 1930s, the majority of higher education institutions offered remedial coursework in reading and centers for study skills (Crowe, 1998). When the once highly selective CUNY established an open admissions policy in 1970, its success (or failure) rested on adequate financial support for remedial and other academic assistance services. Even the University of California, Berkeley required more than half of its entering freshman to take a remedial writing course in 1979, nearly a century after the UC campus developed the nation’s first remedial writing course (Wyatt, 1992).

COLLEGE REMEDIATION TODAY

More than 78% of higher education institutions offer at least one remedial course, suggesting a prevalent need for remediation (Parsad, Lewis, & Greene, 2003). More than 40% of students enrolled in a two-year college and more than 20% of students enrolled in a four-year college took at least one remedial course in Fall 2000 (Parsad et al.). When controlling for academic preparedness, studies found that four-year colleges are considerably less likely to require remediation (Attewell et al., 2006). Similarly, the extent of remediation in public and private institutions is somewhat counterintuitive, as public colleges and universities are more likely to enroll students in remediation.

Further, perhaps due to the sheer number of students taking remedial courses, “there is no ‘typical’ remedial student” (Abraham & Creech, 2000). They may be recent high school graduates and first-time freshman, or they may be students who entered college at least one year after completing high school. Both groups may enter college with little or varying experiences with a rigorous high school curriculum, often cited as an indicator of college readiness (Adelman, 2004). Moreover, many students with limited academic preparedness never enroll in remediation while others with higher levels of academic performance actually enroll in remediation courses (Attewell et al., 2006). The lack of a clear profile of the underprepared student or a universal definition of what constitutes college readiness causes difficulty in understanding the myriad factors that contribute to the need for college remediation. Findings that students enrolled in remedial courses take longer to complete a degree raise particular concerns related to the effectiveness of remedial education. Critics thus argue that low academic standards in colleges rely too heavily on remediation to bring underprepared students “up to speed” and as a result, have evolved into a crisis in higher education. To argue that increases in remedial education brought an “influx” of underprepared students, however, negates the history of higher education and remediation’s role in it.

While remedial courses and programs are not new, neither are its criticisms. Today, as policy makers continue to debate the efficacy of remedial courses and programs, college remediation seems to have little political and institutional endorsement. Groups who may have benefited from remediation in terms of college access seem to shun the practice. As many Blacks and Latinos were tracked into low-level high school classes (Oakes, 2005), they seem to recognize this may reoccur in college, as indicated by enrollment in college remediation. Persistent educational inequalities prevent many students of color from accessing in high school the college preparatory courses considered essential to enroll and succeed in higher education. A recent report by the ACT, for example, argued that only slightly more than 20% of African-American ACT test-takers and 33% of Latinos were found to be academically prepared in 2005 for college reading (ACT, 2006). As a result, Blacks and Latinos are more likely than their White and Asian counterparts to require at least one remedial course in college. Remediation, despite negative tracking practices, may serve as a point of access for students disadvantaged by persistent social and educational inequalities.

Some researchers (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000; Phipps, 1998) suggest remediation is actually more prevalent than is reported, as most institutional leaders may refuse to report remediation due to negative stigmas attached to it. Campuses assess students differently to determine who requires remediation and who does not (Merisotis & Redmond, 2002). As four-year college administrators attempt to maximize prestige, few want to be associated with underprepared students and/or remediation. While the quality of colleges increasingly depends on the quality of students who enter (as indicated by test scores) and the manner in which students leave (i.e., graduation rates), remedial courses threaten to weaken college ratings. Remedial coursework is often considered to be “below ‘college level’” (Phipps, 1998, p. vi) suggesting that administrators may fear hurting their institutions’ reputations merely by conceding that they accept students who may not have initially met their admissions requirements. Remediation thus remains at the margins of higher education, slowly losing ground with college administrators and state policy makers who equate remediation with low standards, quality, and prestige. Perhaps as a result of the perceived stigma placed on remedial students, the distrust by parents, and the marginalization of remediation, remedial courses and so-called remedial students are often left in an indeterminate state.

The higher education community is not the only group complaining about remedial education. A growing number of jobs now require skilled workers. Increases in knowledge-based jobs thus require at least some postsecondary education. Employers, however, argue that too few high school and college graduates have the skills considered necessary to succeed in the workforce, fueling charges of a crisis in academic preparation. Large and small companies across the nation demand an educated workforce and better skilled college graduates. In 2000, for example, 38% of job applicants taking employer-administered tests lacked the required readings skills for the jobs for which they applied (Adelman, 2004; Greene, 2000). In fact, Greene’s Michigan study reported that one company rejected 70% of their applicants due to insufficient math or reading skills. Greene further estimates that the lack of adequate reading, writing, and math skills costs U.S. businesses and postsecondary institutions \$16 billion per year. Indeed, an educated workforce may help companies meet their goals while a less educated workforce may slow productivity and innovation.

Moreover, the United States—and thus the workforce—are increasingly diverse. As historically underrepresented racial/ethnic groups change the nation’s demography, they continue to face challenges associated with educational opportunity and success. States that fail to educate significant portions of their populations, particularly students of color, jeopardize the promotion of equal opportunity and the promise of democracy,

and subsequently fail to reap the benefits that an educated citizenry may provide (Callan, 1994; Ratliff, Rawlings, Ards & Sherman, 1997). In fact, a recent *Measuring Up* report estimates the United States lost more than \$199 billion in 2006 due to significant racial/ethnic group disparities in education and income levels (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2006). Remedial education, cited by many policy makers as the root of the academic problem, is referred to by others as a pathway to access higher education and subsequently greater employment opportunities. With much at stake, it is increasingly important to examine ongoing political debates on the issue of remediation in colleges and universities.

THE POLITICIZATION OF REMEDIAL EDUCATION

To develop an educated workforce, and to maintain the competitiveness of the United States, many policy makers have a renewed interest in remedial education, albeit one that often has a negative social construct. In many higher education policy discussions, college remediation has taken the blame for inadequate academic preparation of high school graduates and college students. Policy makers and media headlines often recognize the social inequalities in American public high schools but place most of their attention on the role of colleges and universities. Hostility towards college remediation, for example, suggests that educational experiences in high school are irreversible (Attewell et al., 2006). College remediation is often viewed as wasting valuable resources such as students' and instructors' time and taxpayers' money.

In response to these concerns, a number of state policy makers proposed to reduce, phase out, or abolish remedial education programs. An estimated 34 states—including Massachusetts, California (California State University), New York (City University of New York), South Dakota, Virginia, Florida, Oklahoma, and Colorado—have taken steps to limit or eliminate college remediation. Often citing cost constraints and the unfairness of “paying double” for students who did not learn necessary skills, a national debate on an issue that previously received little academic and political attention has ensued, most recently since the mid-1990s. National and state debates are often argued with little use of or attention to empirical studies of remedial education (Parker & Shakespeare, forthcoming). To date, remediation debates were often based on ideology (Shaw, 1997) and anecdotal evidence. The CUNY case illustrates how remediation debates manifested in one university system.

Controversy at CUNY

CUNY, the nation's largest urban university, was also one of the most diverse. With more than 70% students of color and immigrants comprising 60% of incoming students, the university long symbolized the rewards and challenges of an open access admissions policy. Led by Rudy Giuliani, then Mayor of New York, critics of remedial education tried to link it to the affirmative action debate (Arendale, 2001), contending that these programs permitted “unqualified” and presumably undeserving students to enter into baccalaureate programs (MacDonald, 1998).

A special task force appointed by Giuliani presented a highly publicized, scathing report on the status of the CUNY. In the report, “An Institution Adrift,” the task force argued that CUNY spent more than \$124 million on remediation. Further, the task force argued that 78% of incoming CUNY freshmen required remediation in some subject in 1997 and more than 50% required remediation in reading specifically. They argued these students offered little return, as illustrated by low graduation rates:

Though CUNY had launched the nation's first affirmative action program for minority students in 1966, both the university and the city continued to be rocked by racial disturbances. So in 1970, CUNY undertook to change its demographics on a far larger scale, through what came to be known as "open admissions." ... CUNY dismantled its entrance requirements; unprepared students would be admitted and given whatever remedial training they needed ... CUNY's experiment in large-scale remedial education may now be declared a failure. (MacDonald, 1994)

Supporters of college remediation, however, argued that the mayor's report was flawed by overestimating the cost of remediation and failing to recognize the diversity of the university. As one of the most diverse universities in the nation, many CUNY students are graduates of New York City public schools, members of underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, and full-time workers. Remediation supporters argued remedial programs symbolize access and opportunity to a bachelor's degree (Arenson, 1999). They contended that remedial education provides underprepared students with the tools needed for them to academically succeed in college. Supporters of remedial education further argued that for many students, remediation opens college doors that would otherwise remain closed.

Despite the arguments related to access and educational opportunity, it came as little surprise that the CUNY Board of Trustees voted to eliminate remedial courses from four-year colleges in 1999. The CUNY Board, primarily comprised of Mayor Giuliani's appointees, was placed in a political milieu. Mayoral leadership and sharp criticisms by the New York press proved to be compelling factors.

Before implementing the ban, however, CUNY had to secure approval from the New York State Board of Regents, which was concerned about the potential impact on diversity. As one of the conditions for initial approval, the Regents required CUNY to provide evidence that the change in policy had not adversely impacted either enrollment or the representation of students of color. Though CUNY provided such evidence, the issue remains controversial on the university's campuses.

CUNY continued its historic struggle to achieve both access and excellence during a time when remedial courses and remedial students were barred from the system's senior colleges. Parker and Richardson (2005), however, found that many students, particularly students of color, failed to achieve the minimal scores required for admission to a four-year college. Further, students eligible for admission were said to still demonstrate levels of underpreparedness, even if they were students who passed the New York State Regents exam, calling changes in quality into question. While the examination was intended in part to raise educational standards and assess student learning, the CUNY case suggests the high-stakes exam is not a predictor of college readiness or success.

The CUNY case illustrates areas of debate that occurred and continue to occur in states across the country. By aligning actors opposed to remediation, critics publicly denounced the university by citing inefficiencies in the system. High rates of remediation and low graduation rates of CUNY colleges were used to demonstrate an "institution adrift." Those opposed to remediation suggested that improved educational quality would come only when remediation was purged from four-year colleges.

As was true in the CUNY case, national political debates on remediation usually center on three areas: outcomes, cost, and the location of remediation. Over the past decade, federal and state policy makers have expressed concern that remediation is ineffective and decreases educational attainment. Remediation is thus seen as too costly. Many state policy makers suggest that remediation does not belong in college-level programs. Instead, community colleges are viewed as a more appropriate avenue to resolve remediation concerns of four-year colleges. The discussion below highlights the

positions within each of these areas, as well as how these issues played out at the City University of New York.

Remediation outcomes

Remedial education studies that look at outcomes generally examine grade point averages (GPAs), student retention, and degree completion. Despite replicated results in a number of studies (Boylan & Saxon, 1999; Kraska, 1990; McCormick, Horn, & Knepper, 1996; Parsad et al., 2003; Seybert & Soltz, 1992), findings should be considered with caution. The majority of research focuses on one academic subject (i.e., remedial math) or one college campus. A clear deficiency in the remediation literature is the lack of research on the impact of remedial education at four-year colleges or universities. The potential effect on students who begin in or transfer to a baccalaureate program is therefore difficult to assess. An additional shortcoming is that student outcomes are rarely disaggregated by race and ethnicity. Outcomes of African American and Latino students, until recently, were seldom analyzed despite their disproportionate enrollment in remedial programs. In spite of these limitations, remediation studies offer important contributions to the debate and provide a foundation for avenues of future research.

While most remediation outcomes studies were often restricted to community colleges, many suggested remedial students can be successful in terms of grade point average (GPA) (Chen & Cheng, 1999), retention (McCormick et al., 1996), and employment after college (McCabe, 2000). Studies that examined GPAs took place in community colleges and generally found that students enrolled in remedial courses had comparable grades to those of students who did not require remedial courses. Kraska (1990) found that first-year GPAs in math courses were significantly higher for remedial students than non-remedial students and were slightly higher in English courses. Chen and Cheng suggested that improvements in GPAs may be explained by changes over time. Their case study of the CUNY showed remedial students improved their grade point averages to a point comparable to non-remedial students after three years of college. After five years, remedial students actually had higher average GPAs than students who did not receive remediation (Chen & Cheng).

A study at CUNY by Lavin and Hyllegard (1996) found that remedial education promoted retention and graduation. Given that students enrolled in these courses are generally older and most often began their academic careers in community colleges, these findings suggest that students benefit from remedial education. Elimination of the program could result in the significant loss of students who may otherwise succeed if given the time required to do so. Time to degree, however, is not something state and higher-education policy makers want to bestow upon colleges and university when there is increasing national attention on graduation rates.

Studies that examined the impact of remedial education on degree completion are inconclusive. While one study (McCormick et al., 1996) suggested remediation aids retention and degree completion, another argued this was only the case for two-year colleges (Attewell et al., 2006). Both studies agreed remedial students took longer to graduate. Once enrolled in remedial courses, students took approximately one year longer to obtain a baccalaureate degree (McCormick et al.). Attewell and his colleagues also found chances for graduation were slightly reduced for students enrolled in remedial courses. Lower graduation rates, however, were linked to underpreparation in high school as opposed to participation in college remedial courses. In other words, graduation rates are generally lower for underprepared students than for students with more academic preparation. In one study of the Ohio state system, Bettinger and Long (2006) tried to account for this preparation and academic ability bias. They found that students

who were similarly underprepared and took remedial courses were less likely to “stop out” and were more likely to complete their degrees after four years.

Studies also suggest that the type of remedial coursework is important in terms of educational outcomes. Students enrolled in remedial reading, for example, are less likely to earn a degree, compared to students of similar academic ability who did not enroll in remediation (Adelman, 2004; Attewell et al., 2006). Attewell and his colleagues, however, found that even 40% of the students taking remedial reading courses earned a four-year degree. They also suggested that students in two-year colleges who took remedial writing improved their chances of earning a degree.

Still, some argue that remediation is no longer needed because of the expectation that raised academic standards in high schools will drastically improve student preparedness (Arendale, 2001). In 1996, for instance, New York State required all New York high school seniors to pass a Regents exam in order to graduate. Raising graduation standards in high schools, however, does not automatically change social inequalities that continue to plague public schools. Public concerns related to teacher preparation and turnover, crowded classrooms, inadequate textbooks, and the lack of advanced placement (AP) courses cannot be changed with the implementation of an “exit” exam.

Further, student tracking and lack of academic resources (Lavin & Hyllegard, 1996; Trent et al., 2002), are often cited as reasons for the overrepresentation of students of color in remedial education and community colleges. Indeed, Blacks are more likely than their White counterparts to take college remedial courses (Attewell et al., 2006). Still, many institutions have raised their admissions criteria, making it more difficult to gain entry. In the CUNY, for example, Black and Latino students were more likely than Whites to fail the CUNY basic skills test required for admission three years after New York implemented the Regents high school graduation exam (Parker & Richardson, 2005). Like increased high school graduation requirements, raising admission standards did not eliminate the *need* for remedial education. Arendale (2001) suggests that faculty expectations will also rise, requiring students to seek supplemental academic support. Such was the case at a minimum of two CUNY four-year colleges (Parker & Richardson, 2005). It is safe to say that remediation, in some form, will remain necessary for many students for years to come.

Cost

As higher education is faced with the challenge of increased accountability and decreased public resources, efficiency and quality goals are on the rise. Remediation is often on the receiving end of criticisms regarding ways to “trim the fat off” higher education budgets. Further, little is known about the impact of enrollment in college remediation and various academic and employer outcomes. There are few empirical studies from which to draw conclusions about the benefits and/or disadvantages of participating in remedial coursework. The issue of remediation thus has become an easy target for higher education leaders to criticize and discredit in the name of quality and efficiency.

Recently, the U.S. Department of Education’s National Commission on the Future of Higher Education argued underprepared high school graduates “waste time and taxpayer dollars” by enrolling in remedial courses (U.S. Department of Education, 2006, p. vii). The arguments against using tax dollars to pay for remediation are based on the belief that remedial education provides skills that should have been learned in high school. Indeed critics argue that it is too late, once on campus, to master basic skills in writing, reading, and mathematics (D’Souza, 1992). An editorial in the *San Diego Union-Tribune* questioned why students should be “spoon-fed the basics” by colleges that have limited resources and face decreasing public support (“Bone-head ed.; maintain CSU policy on remedial admissions,” 2002).

Those who supported ending remediation at CUNY often did so in the name of increased accountability, educational quality, and efficiency. Pinning poor institutional academic performance on the tail of remedial coursework, CUNY could quickly demonstrate its responsiveness to political demands for educational quality by simply removing remedial courses and students from the four-year colleges. Little consideration was therefore given to students who could benefit from a four-year college education despite having standardized test scores that fell below admissions requirements.

Faced with potential (Darch, Carnine, & Kameenui, 1986) remedial needs of high school graduates, lawmakers must not only resolve whether to offer remediation, but they must also grapple with who should pay for it. Clearly, deciding who should pay is linked to who is to blame. While many high schools have implemented state-wide exit exams, students still enter institutions of higher education needing to develop college level skills. At CUNY, some students who obtain required test scores still had trouble with reading, writing, and math. It might be argued then that CUNY successfully changed its image of maintaining low standards but failed to redress persistent social inequalities or improve student retention.

High schools are thus often blamed for not properly preparing students for college. As a result, policy makers in Florida, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and other states have already considered plans to charge high school districts for remedial education (Arendale, 2001). In Oklahoma, the Board of Regents and the State's Department of Education collaborated to track remediation rates of graduates from each high school. Public state college students requiring remediation pay an additional fee for remedial courses and may not use state financial aid to assist them with remedial courses. In 2003–2004, students in Oklahoma requiring remediation paid an additional \$13 per credit at community colleges and \$24 per credit at comprehensive universities (Oklahoma State System of Higher Education, 2004). Similarly the state of Florida proposed to charge the individual student the “true cost” of a remedial course, which could equate to up to three times as much as “college-level” courses (Arendale, 2001, p. 1). Similarly, prior to reducing remediation to CUNY community colleges, the mayor's task force on CUNY argued that privatizing remediation would save the university financially.

Proposals to charge students place the question of “paying double” in new light. Indeed, while opponents of remediation argue the taxpayer is double-billed for secondary education and postsecondary remedial programs, little consideration is given to the students who may pay more for skills not learned or perhaps even taught in high school. Parents of high school graduates often pay their taxes, their children's tuition, and, if remediation is no longer available, may pay the cost of reduced educational opportunities.

Moreover, some researchers suggest concerns regarding cost are exaggerated. In one of only two national studies, Breneman and Haarlow (1998) concurred with a previous study that showed remedial education costs equated to approximately one% of public higher-education institution budgets. When examining the cost of remediation per full-time equivalents (FTE), researchers at the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) found the costs for remediation per FTE were actually lower than the cost of other core instruction such as English and math (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000; Phipps, 1998).

While some policy makers suggest that remedial education still simply costs too much, Breneman and Haarlow (1998) argued that the benefits outweigh the costs, particularly if denying access is the alternative. Remediation therefore may be a wise investment, particularly if it provides access to a college education that ultimately contributes to the public good (Phipps, 1998). Astin (2000) argued that effective remedial education “would do more to alleviate our most serious social and economic problems than almost any other action we could take” (p. 130). Similarly, Long (2005) as well as Breneman

and Haarlow warn that the social costs of not offering remediation will have a dramatic impact on the nation's ability to compete in a global arena. Long cautions "lower levels of education are associated with higher rates of unemployment, government dependency, crime and incarceration." The cost of eliminating remedial education, therefore, is likely to be much higher than the expense of the programs.

Arguments for the human costs of not offering remediation were undermined at CUNY. University critic, Heather MacDonald (1994), argued instead that too many lives would be hurt by too much remediation as students would be set up for failure, as indicated by high drop-out rates and low graduation rates. Remediation was considered to be the primary barrier preventing CUNY from improving educational quality and returning the University to its former stature of greatness.

The location of remediation

Some policy makers and other higher-education leaders suggest that remedial education is most cost-effective when contained in two-year colleges. As a result, some states have limited remedial education to public community colleges. This seems to appease four-year college administrators who also feel the pressure to produce and increase efficiency because it frees them to pursue more prestigious avenues, such as improving educational quality. Indeed, CUNY four-year college administrators argued that community colleges were better equipped to serve underprepared students and to offer remedial services (Parker & Richardson, 2005). A report from the American Association of Community Colleges argues, "community colleges have the right programs in the right locations; they are dedicated to access and opportunity and have worked successfully with underprepared students for decades" (Day & McCabe, 1997). Policies that limit remediation to community colleges assume that two-year institutions benefit underprepared students without the pressure of "catching up" during their first year of college. These policies, however, also overlook the fact that students who begin at community colleges are less likely to earn a baccalaureate degree (Astin, 1975; Bailey & Weininger, 2002; Bernstein & Eaton, 1994; Olivas, 1979; Solmon, Solmon, & Schiff, 2002). Thus, Phipps (1998) argues that remediation is an "inappropriate function of community colleges" (p. v).

As open admissions institutions, community colleges are often obligated to offer remedial courses. Remediation, however, is not the only purpose of community colleges. Most community colleges are expected to maintain multiple missions, ranging from college preparation to vocational education to associate degree completion. States may therefore use the community college as a means to balance college access demands. States can then maintain or increase the selectivity of four-year colleges by diverting some students to the less expensive two-year college (Wellman, 2002).

Referring students designated as remedial to community colleges has important implications. This is particularly true because there is not an established standard that determines college-readiness, academic preparation, and/or requirements for remediation. Instead, each state, higher education system, and/or institution may have different definitions and measures of what remedial education means on a particular campus (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). Further, Merisotis and Phipps analyzed Maryland remediation data and found that even when students participated in college preparatory programs, they were more likely to require remediation at community colleges than at four-year colleges. This finding is counterintuitive since most people consider the community colleges to be less academically rigorous in comparison to their four-year counterparts. In addition, it suggests that labeling students as remedial is problematic and may unnecessarily limit students to a community college when they might benefit from entering a four-year college.

When CUNY voted to limit remediation to its community colleges, it was a compromise after critics proposed privatizing remediation. The mayor's advisory task force charged with recommending changes for the university proposed to outsource remediation to for-profit educational organizations, local private and independent postsecondary institutions, or community-based organizations. The proposal to send remediation to the for-profit sector was rejected, as were other stated suggestions. The chair of the task force, Benno Schmidt, had a conflict of interest: he was also chair of the Edison Project, an organization that privatizes public education. Placing remediation in the CUNY two-year colleges appeared to be CUNY's best alternative.

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO EVOLVING REMEDIATION POLICIES

State policies that may limit remediation may also determine where remediation can be offered and how many students can enroll in remediation as well as when remedial students are eligible to take "college level" courses. Few researchers have examined the ways institutions responded to changes in remediation policy. This section further draws on changes in the CUNY system as well as higher education and remediation literature that offers insight into the ways colleges and universities might respond to increasing demands for educational quality and reduced remediation.

Institutions faced with mandated state policies related to remedial education may respond in a number of ways. Some may simply get out of the remediation business by outsourcing services to private companies such as Kaplan and Sylvan Learning, as CUNY proposed to do. Others may unreservedly welcome state educational standards by precisely following any remediation policy guidelines or by establishing institutional policies with even greater restrictions. In contrast, some institutions may resist the ideology of state policy and take a more student-centered approach to serving the needs of underprepared students (Shaw, 1997).

Maintaining a learning environment to address student preparation concerns begins with proper assessment and placement, is manifested in the curriculum and academic support services, and continues through evaluation (Phipps, 1998). The method of identifying students as remedial is critical to ensuring that students are properly placed with the necessary support. In Shaw's (1997) comparative case study of three community colleges, one institution complied with state regulations to test students for remediation but failed to monitor students' course-taking. Some students, therefore, took college-level courses or even transferred to four-year colleges before exiting from remediation. Similarly, institutions that maintain a flexible curriculum might better accommodate various learning styles of differently prepared students. Placement exams, like remedial courses and services, require monitoring and evaluation. Understanding the validity, reliability, and predictability of placement exams and the effectiveness of regular remedial courses and services is vital to understanding the value of remediation, particularly as it relates to student persistence and completion.

At the City University of New York (CUNY), students are first admitted based on a college admissions average (including high school grades) but are ineligible to enroll if they fail to pass one of three placement exams in reading, writing, and math. Perseverant students enrolled in a CUNY community college or left the university system to enroll in another college, such as a private college in New York City. Most students, however, did not enroll at any college following the change in policy (Parker & Richardson 2005). In California, students requiring remediation are permitted one year to demonstrate academic proficiency by passing standardized placement exams in math and English. Students who fail to do so are de-enrolled from the college. With much

at stake, evaluating placement exams and helping students to pass them is particularly significant in states with reduced remediation.

To help students exit from remedial courses, CUNY colleges implemented a number of transition and outreach programs to help students pass the exit exams. Prior to the end of remediation, immersion programs were designed to provide students with assistance in skill development to help them in baccalaureate coursework. After remediation, faculty and staff argued that immersion programs did not improve underprepared students' ability to succeed in the classroom. Further, campus administrators reported immersion programs as being very helpful in getting students to pass proficiency exams but failing to provide students with the tools and skills required to succeed in college-level courses (Parker & Richardson, 2005).

Simpson, Stahl, and Francis (2004) caution against teaching to the test. They advocate for process-oriented techniques that focus on the whole cognitive development of students, rather than on simply improving test scores. The goal of this model is to assist students in becoming active readers and learners who can assess their progress, rather than narrowly focusing on their deficits. This strategy represents a shift in values from expecting students to arrive to campus already “smart” to expecting institutions to “develop smartness” (Astin, 2000). The focus then becomes one of using instruction to teaching skills and techniques that may uncover broader learning difficulties that extend beyond a single exam (Simpson et al., 2004). Public policy, however, seems only minimally concerned about the practices and instruction of remediation. Indeed many policy makers demonstrated more interest in outcomes (i.e., graduation rates) as an indication of academic success and quality. The nuances of what it may take to improve the success rate for students taking remedial courses are therefore negated.

Decentralized remediation

In some institutions, remedial programs have been replaced with initiatives designed to transfer skills across disciplines. The Writing Across the Curriculum movement, for example, responded to perceived declines in literacy and college readiness by emphasizing writing in discipline-based courses. Similarly, Cox, Freisner, and Khayum (2003), for example, found that students who took a course that integrates reading instruction across disciplines were more successful in college than those in traditional, stand-alone reading instruction courses.

A number of colleges have begun to “mainstream” or decentralize remediation. By removing “stand-alone” remediation programs, colleges hold all academic departments accountable for meeting remedial needs. Soliday (2002), however, cautions against mainstreaming. She argues that a mixed approach is best—where remedial courses are only one step in a larger process of developing skills. Remedial education instructors might support students by building coalitions with other faculty who are in the disciplines. Recent research demonstrates conflicting reports on how many institutions actually use mainstreaming as their remediation strategy, with estimates ranging from 15 to 58% for community colleges. Estimates for both two- and four-year colleges ranged from 41 to 48% (Perin, 2002). The effectiveness of decentralized remediation is also inconclusive, yet Perin argues that both strategies are promising, provided the college is committed to improving services to develop skills of underprepared students.

Pedagogy

While the jury is still out on mainstreaming and centralizing remedial education, it is important that remedial instructors are able to provide evidence to support remedial education in the face of political critiques. As a result, remediation instructors must

provide a systematic and scholarly approach to educating students. Simpson et al. (2004) argue this is possible by adopting research-based approaches to learning. Approaches that promote lifelong learning provide context for meaning and better enable students to expand and retain learning over time are considered most promising. As a result, the researchers also suggest using cumulative evaluation to hold students accountable over time, rather than for only one exam. They further suggest utilizing a collection of formal and informal assessment procedures to identify strategies to monitor and assess progress of individual students. Once instructors can ascertain what factor or factors are limiting students, they will better address these needs to help students succeed (Nelson, 1998; Yaworski, Weber, & Ibrahim, 2000).

At Queensborough Community College in the CUNY system, faculty are encouraged to study pedagogy. At senior colleges faculty are most often trained to do research, as opposed to teaching. Senior college faculty members may therefore shy away from teaching remedial courses. Conversely, faculty at community colleges, including those who are full-time, teach remediation. Shaw (1997) found that one of her study case sites does not hire faculty who cannot or refuse to teach remedial students.

Some community college faculty therefore moved beyond mere training and began to study pedagogy to improve their effectiveness as teachers (Parker, forthcoming). This line of research is critically important for community colleges designated to offer remediation. This research may also be useful to faculty and administrators at four-year colleges, who may demonstrate ways remediation can be incorporated into the institution without reducing quality. Recognizing its role in offering remediation, CUNY community colleges seem to be taking the initial steps to meet challenges presented by a changing policy environment.

BALANCING REMEDIATION GOALS WITH INSTITUTIONAL GOALS

Clearly, remediation plays an important role in addressing myriad student needs. As high schools fail to adequately prepare students for college, colleges and universities often fail to align their expectations with the skills students bring with them from high school. While many states demonstrate an interest in P/K–16 initiatives to help alleviate this gap between sectors, few fund or provide adequate staffing for such collaboration (Krueger, 2006).

Soliday (2002) argues that it is important to recognize the role of remediation in addressing student needs, but it is equally important to recognize the ways remediation addresses institutional goals. By offering remediation, institutions are able to expand access and also maintain selectivity (Bettinger & Long, 2006). By limiting remediation to two-year colleges where students' chances of earning a baccalaureate degree are reduced, however, policy makers may unnecessarily increase stratification in the state's public higher education system (Gumport & Bastedo, 2001; Soliday, 2002). In this respect, remediation is not used as a tool to "fulfill institutional commitments to open access for a special group of students" (Soliday, 2002, p. 48). Instead, remediation is used as a "gatekeeper and a[n institutional] quality control" (Attewell et al., 2005, p. 29).

Reducing remedial programs may thus be used to resolve issues that arise from increasing demand for higher education. Growth in enrollment, curriculum, mission, and standards may be curtailed by stratified remedial programs. Some colleges may thus choose to "redress high school preparation problems" (Attewell et al., 2005, p. 30) and recognize remediation as a "second-chance policy" while other institutions may consider low academic preparation as "irreversible," thereby reducing college remediation to symbolize educational quality.

To balance student needs with institutional goals, Soliday argued it is imperative for remediation faculty to engage in educational policymaking to oppose the attacks on remediation as well as the “defunding and retiering” of remedial programs. She urges faculty to “adopt the role of intellectual and become involved in these debates that” affect classroom instruction (Soliday, 2002, p. 144). Indeed, innovative classroom instruction may help to inform research, which in turn should inform policy. Subsequently, policy may also inform research and instruction.

The participation of remediation and other faculty in the remediation debates is imperative to the development of relevant research and policymaking. Many of the policy discussions have been anecdotal, with little attention to the available research. This suggests that researchers have failed to make research relevant to policy makers. New pedagogies used in the classroom and more research on the outcomes of remediation (particularly innovative classroom instruction) are needed. Policy makers must be equipped with the tools needed to defend remediation.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite a long history at some of the nation’s oldest and most prestigious institutions, remedial education remains at the margins of higher education in the United States. Policy makers suggest that issues related to accountability, efficiency, educational quality, degree completion, and student success are at risk due to high levels of remedial education across the nation. Further, many state and university-system-level policy makers have discussed and debated the issue with little consideration of the available research and/or public involvement. The case of the City University of New York, for example, suggests that the issue had political motivations with little evidence of improvements in either educational quality or efficiency of the University. CUNY’s reputation, however, seemed to improve as the University is no longer distracted by headlines labeling it “Remedial U.”

The CUNY case thus illustrates some of the fundamental problems within the remedial education political debates. Efforts to improve reputation and prestige are often masked by arguments for improved educational quality. Perhaps as a result, college remediation has become the scapegoat for many of the challenges facing higher education. Many of the arguments for and against remedial education tend to perpetuate the myth that colleges and universities cannot maintain access and excellence. Critics of remedial education fault such courses and services as catering to an unqualified student body. By failing to demonstrate the significance of providing wide access to higher education and its social and economic benefits, remediation advocates failed to address the perhaps more politically compelling arguments related to educational quality and reform.

Definitions for underpreparedness and remediation are arbitrary; policies that reduce or eliminate remediation may unnecessarily exclude students who might benefit from a four-year college experience from pursuing a college degree. Until we resolve how to measure remedial needs more accurately to identify remedial students and improve the K–12 system, it is imperative that colleges and universities continue to offer remediation. Indeed, despite claims otherwise, evidence that eliminating remediation improves quality is lacking.

Moreover, when state or university systems eliminate remediation, they often do so without consideration that the need for remediation still exists. To date, high schools have not successfully and consistently met the challenge of preparing our youth for college. This chapter did not evaluate the effectiveness of remediation programs per se, but concerns related to the delivery of remediation should be addressed. Ending remediation

does not only eliminate specific courses, services, or programs. Rather, it may potentially exclude thousands of students who might otherwise benefit from any college in general and a four-year college in particular. The key, then, appears to be finding ways to increase preparedness by meeting students' needs while at the same time reducing the very need for remediation. Too often, policy discussions never get to this level. Today, there are not enough schools with adequate human, fiscal, and academic resources needed to prepare for higher education. Thus, colleges and universities continue to have an obligation to "accept students where they are" and provide the support necessary for them to excel and complete a baccalaureate degree. This should be the measure of educational quality: the institution's ability to educate students, not a student's ability to pass a standardized exam for admission. Ending programs is a quick fix that may boost prestige but does not promote access or student success. If higher education turns its back to students deemed underprepared for admission and thus denies them the opportunity to "prove themselves," we risk failing to educate significant proportions of diverse populations. As the U.S. is an increasingly diverse society, such policies may ultimately weaken the social and economic benefits of an educated citizenry.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND POLICY

In this section, I consider the issues that are central to remediation policy debates presented in this chapter and offer a number of recommendations for practice and policy. Recommendations to improve the delivery and outcomes of remediation are directed to instructors and program directors who on a daily basis provide support, guidance, and skill development to underprepared students. These actors play a key role in informing policy to maintain, evaluate, and/or change current remediation policies. Recommendations for policy are directed toward institutional and state higher education policy makers who have considered or may consider limiting remediation.

Current reductions in remediation seem to assume that what occurs in remediation classrooms is so ineffective that enrollment in such courses decreases students' chances of completing their degrees. The truth is that we know very little about what goes on inside the remediation classroom. We know even less about what happens when remediation is decentralized to allow academic departments to share the responsibility of preparing students deemed underprepared. Remedial instructors must therefore seek new ways to share their successes. Studying pedagogy and student learning are keys to moving remediation from the margins of higher education and removing the negative stigmas attached to it.

Future policy decisions regarding remediation should consider the capacity of the state's public high schools to meet the challenges of preparing students if remedial education is not an option. Colleges that decide to eliminate remedial education courses must find ways of continuing to accommodate less well-prepared students, who may still be able to benefit from a four-year college education. States should continue to encourage and support collaboration between high schools and higher education. K–16 initiatives may help to reduce the potential of colleges moving too far ahead of high schools. Educational gaps between racial/ethnic and SES groups will continue to grow if colleges continue to limit access while high schools cannot meet the challenges.

Finally, states and university systems should reconsider access and excellence so that the one goal does not automatically oppose the other. Instead, higher education leaders should use remedial programs (courses, support services, etc.) to support the educational mission of colleges and universities. Instead of placing emphasis on admitting the most qualified students, policy makers should refocus efforts on improving preparation of all students and providing them with the tools necessary to be successful in college.

Relegating students who do not meet admissions requirements to community colleges where their chances of obtaining a baccalaureate degree are reduced is ill-advised public policy.

FUTURE AVENUES

Directions for future research relate to filling some of the gaps in the literature related to college remediation, as well as to providing policy makers with evidence to make informed policy. Areas of future research include research on the impact on educational outcomes, the effectiveness of remedial programs, and the consequences of not providing them, including improving understanding of what states are doing and to what effect.

Research on the impact of remedial education on educational outcomes must not only continue to examine persistence and degree completion, as previously mentioned, but it must also disaggregate data by race and ethnicity. As students of color disproportionately enroll in remedial courses, they are also likely to be disproportionately impacted by changes in remediation policy. Future research should examine the ways racial and ethnic groups are impacted by policies that eliminate or reduce remediation. Additional research should also improve our understanding of the consequences (or benefits) of reserving community colleges for remediation by prohibiting remediation instruction and underprepared students from four-year colleges.

As higher education institutions are forced to adapt to evolving remediation policies, it will be increasingly important to understand the effectiveness of different types of remediation. Future research should help to answer questions related to the effectiveness of remediation in the classroom and which services best support students.

While it is critical to know more about what is working in remediation, it is equally important to study the effects of eliminating remediation to better understand the human cost of not providing remedial courses and services. A national study is long overdue to examine changes across different types of institutions in different U.S. regions.

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