

RiLADE

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An Interview with Brandon Protas of Complete College America On Co-requisite Remediation.

By Patti Levine Brown and Kathleen Ciez-Volz

For many years the Council of Learning Assistance and Developmental Education Associations has provided guidance to those working in the field of learning assistance and developmental education on numerous curriculum practices. One of the most written about in recent years is corequisite remediation, a practice designed to pair a course that supports students' needs for skills review with a college credit-bearing course.

Research has shown that these courses, paired with one another in the same semester, can increase the percentage of those students who complete gateway courses. Referencing the report by Complete College America (CCA) listed in this interview, Michael Nietzel, President Emeritus of Missouri State University and presently Senior Contributor in Education for *Forbes* (March of 2022), stated that corequisite courses significantly increased the percentage of students completing gateway math and English courses in the state of Georgia.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelnietzel/2022/03/27/louisiana-ends-remedial-courses-at-its-public-colleges-and-universities/?sh=31bcd5f77bd0>

Furthermore, in a December 2022 research brief, Isaac Kwakye and KC Deane, focusing on equity access, specifically mention states that have helped students achieve degree completion through the overhauling of course curriculum structure.

<https://wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2022.12.StateStrategies.EquityAccess.pdf>

As stated in this interview with Dr. Brandon Protas, an Assistant Vice President for Alliance Engagement for Complete College America, (CCA), this national organization, as well as

research in the field, has strongly supported the implementation of corequisite courses. Much of the information in this interview focuses on corequisites as a primary model for teaching as well as how these course support equitable student success.

However, it should be noted that long before others outside the field of learning assistance and developmental education began advocating for structural changes in course curriculum, members of CLADEA were presenting, writing, and advocating for creative and innovative ways to assist students who needed academic support prior to entering college credit courses. In fact, the co-requisite model is based on the Accelerated Learning Program developed at the Community College of Baltimore County by Peter Adams and his colleagues.

Dr. Brandon Protas is Assistant Vice President for Alliance Engagement for Complete College America, a national organization with a mission to advocate for increasing college completion rates and closing institutional performance gaps by working with states, systems, institutions, and partners to scale effective structural reforms and promote policies that improve student success (Information taken from the CCA website mission <https://completecollege.org/about-us/>). This interview, focusing on corequisite remediation, was conducted by Dr. Patti Levine Brown, Associate Professor at Appalachian State University and former community college professor, and Dr. Kathleen Ciez-Volz, Associate Provost of Curriculum and Instruction at Florida State College at Jacksonville.

- What are the main reasons CCA sees corequisites as the primary model for teaching developmental education courses?

Complete College America focuses on increasing college completion while reducing institutional performance gaps. In our publication, *[No Room for Doubt: Moving Corequisite Support from Idea to Imperative](#)*, we make the case that corequisite support should be the norm because of the overwhelming evidence that it is the best model for both students and colleges. This research-based recommendation includes short-term student success outcomes, such as the significant increase in students' pass rates in their college-level gateway English and math courses, as well as long-term outcomes, such as improved graduation rates. CCA (2021) found that colleges and universities that adopted coreq at scale saw a net financial benefit through a return-on-investment study due to better retention and increased student enrollment. CCA uses the term *institutional performance gaps* rather than *equity* or *achievement gaps* to remind us that we are responsible for addressing these issues. The data across the country show that when colleges and universities adopt coreq support and direct access to college-level courses, all student groups benefit – across different racial groups, students from under-resourced communities, first-generation students, students with disabilities, and more (Xiaotao Ran & Lin, 2022). We have yet to find a study that shows better student outcomes for developmental education than coreq.

- How does scaling corequisites support equitable student success?

To understand the inequities in traditional remediation, we need to interrogate how traditional, test-based placement works at colleges and universities and how it marginalizes

and excludes BILPOC (Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and People of Color) students' access and success in college. Placement often uses a deficit approach and does not allow institutions to see what students bring with them, let alone their potential and their passions. Such placement methods do not illuminate how students could be successful when given supportive learning environments. When done right, coreq support disrupts this cycle because all students enroll in the college-level course, and those who need or want extra support to receive it. Normalizing help can be huge. And the results are clear. In the CCA publication, [*Corequisite Works: Student Success Models at the University System of Georgia*](#), we show how the faculty and staff have effectively eliminated institutional performance gaps with Black, Latinx, White, Pell-eligible, and first-generation students passing their college-level courses near, at, or above the average of all students. They did this after fully scaling corequisite support across their more than two dozen colleges and universities, including open access, highly selective, small, medium, rural, and urban schools, and HBCUs and HSIs.

- Your website states that CCA audited best practices nationwide from corequisite leaders. Can you discuss a few of these best practices?

Corequisite support is both a structural and a pedagogical solution. And it is also a process. We find that the best solutions come from a combination of grass-tops level, grass-roots approach. System or state leaders use policy at a grass-tops approach, setting a clear vision and standard for the change they expect. It is also important to have the faculty, staff, and leadership at colleges and universities be part of the implementation process so that they are driving the change. As the California Acceleration Project (2022) illustrates, corequisite entails a fundamental shift in how we see and serve students. This model needs to be deeply understood to be fully embraced. From a structural perspective, coreq moves away from the long sequences of traditional remediation and makes the college-level class the default for all entering students, who can pair it with a corequisite course if they want or need extra support. There is also a shift in curriculum with the coreq support focused on the content of the college-level course, which is a different mindset than teaching or reteaching everything from the ground up.

- Implementing corequisites by scale is a process that CCA describes as a student success and equity imperative. What is involved in this process, and how can CCA help educational institutions do this?

Besides the policy and the practice, the change of perspectives is huge. CCA understands how to convene the right people at the right time to have the right conversations about student success. When we work with colleges and universities implementing corequisite support at scale, we begin by making a case for urgency and creating the conditions for change. For example, we (CCA) show how students in long sequences of traditional prerequisite remediation rarely make it to and through college-level coursework and explain attrition's role. By contrasting these reports with the disaggregated data from coreq models, it is hard to argue against something that achieves better outcomes (CCA, 2021). Together, faculty, staff, and leadership wrestle with data to understand their current state of student

success and how it is or is not working to achieve their goals. Going to full scale is a college-wide solution when fully integrated and takes coordinated efforts across stakeholder groups. Bailey, et al.'s frequently cited book *Redesigning America's Community Colleges* (2015) provides a foundation for applying a holistic approach—a guided pathway—to student (and institutional) success. The CCA also offers processes and technical assistance that help colleges and universities move in this direction.

- Can you speak to the importance of corequisite support being designed via a holistic approach?

While corequisite support is essential to students gaining momentum as they first enter college, it should be combined with other student success strategies. For example, conversations about corequisite support should be integrated with discussions of different student success strategies, such as the impact of multiple measures for placement, how coreq should be combined with math pathways, and how advisors play a crucial role in introducing this model to students. We need to understand the lived experiences of our students and speak to them in ways that acknowledge who they are. For example, a returning adult student who has been out of school for some time and had mixed experiences in high school may have anxiety about what college will be like for them and whether they will succeed. When we set up barriers to entry for them, we send very real messages that impact their sense of belonging, particularly when they focus on deficits. However, when we take an asset-based approach and build on their strengths – which coreq does – we instill our confidence in them and assure them of our commitment to their success. For racially-minoritized students taking coreq support, we have the opportunity to set the stage for how our colleges and universities view them and how we invest in them.

- Why do you feel there has been a slow adoption of the corequisite model?

It takes time to shift paradigms, and with coreq there is a piece that can seem counterintuitive at first. For example, when I first learned about coreq, I remember asking myself, "How can you put a student in college algebra if they can't do fractions?" But I really needed to examine the question itself to unpack it. First, there was an assumption that a student could not do fractions. But it could have been they could not do a problem with fractions on an Accuplacer test taken out of context without any review or preparation. There is also an assumption about the importance of procedural math versus conceptual math that did not allow insight into how the student understood the theory of math behind the operations that they could tap into. There was also an assumption that the student should take algebra rather than another math course more relevant to their program of study. More than anything, there was a deficit approach focused on what the student could not do rather than an asset-based approach about what skills and knowledge the student did possess and what they could do on their own, with peer support, or with just-in-time instruction without the need for multiple courses of prerequisite instruction. As you can see, this really is a shift in believing that students can be successful when they have the proper support through a different model.

When the national conversation shifted to developmental education reform, some faculty thought this was an attack on them rather than a call to change the traditional prerequisite remedial structures identified as the problem. Instructors who understand the pedagogical needs of adults combined with developmental psychology are some of the best assets in supporting students because they understand student learning and the reality of student lives. They understand that a student who can go directly into the college course with coreq support and complete it in one semester is far more likely to be successful in college than a student facing multiple semesters of remediation – both from an academic and motivational perspective. Additionally, some colleges might have had concerns about lost revenue when reducing the number of dev ed courses offered, but as we've shown, student retention offsets that.

- CCA states that the impact of corequisite model reforms will be limited if not paired with pedagogical best practices tailored to the needs of corequisite students. For example, your organization has recommended using the practice of just-in-time teaching. Can you speak to this practice for our readers?

Just-in-time teaching is not compressing multiple semesters of content into a single course but rather providing extra support for the content students are learning in their college-level courses as they need it. With the example I used above, a student may not have been able to do fractions on the spot when taking a standardized test, but this doesn't mean that they need three semesters of prerequisite remediation to learn the skill. If they graduate from high school, they've seen the material before and can tap into their prior knowledge with individual or small group instruction to bring it back into the right context. Corequisite support classroom practices include a review of material that is foundational to the college course, a preview of material coming up next, lots and lots of practice, the development of meta-cognition for students to see themselves as learners, and student-centered active teaching with culturally relevant instruction. The [techniques video library on the K. Patricia Cross Academy website](#) provides robust resources for fostering just-in-time teaching and learning.

- Over the past decade, Complete College America (CCA) has strongly supported the idea of corequisite remediation as the norm for teaching developmental education courses. Unfortunately, many colleges and universities do not have the resources for developing corequisite courses. How can they get help developing the courses?

The bottom line is colleges and universities should do what is best for student success. We have yet to see reforms in education that yield results as significant as corequisite support. Therefore, we think it should be the norm for college students in developmental education. The effectiveness of corequisite is being recognized more and more through system and state policies. The best policies allow time for scaled implementation and funding to support this work so that there is college-wide engagement in the transformation process. If you are in a state that has passed these policies, find out how to be part of the scaling process. If you are in a state that does not have a corequisite yet, push for not only coreq policy but for funding for professional development, technical assistance, and the creation of communities of

practice for the people on the ground who have direct contact with students. Engage all the stakeholders at your college or university, including faculty, staff, and leadership. This should be an active, iterative process with continuous improvement. There are lots of colleges and universities already doing great work that can serve as models as well as organizations like CCA that can help.

While this interview is not a comprehensive examination of corequisite remediation, it does offer suggestions for applying the model. States and institutions that are considering corequisite learning must allow sufficient time for such a transformation, a critical component of which is adequate faculty professional development. In addition, they must allocate sufficient resources if this transformation is to take place. Ultimately, the key lies in creating a workable pathway that will lead to both student and institutional success.

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