



PRESS RELEASE

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New Initiative Aims to Advance Developmental Mathematics Students in Texas Community Colleges

Austin, Texas, May 9, 2012—High failure rates in mathematics developmental education courses prevent hundreds of thousands of students from progressing in their academic programs each year, contributing to a national crisis.

To address this crisis, the Texas Association of Community Colleges (TACC) and the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin today announce a statewide initiative to meet the needs of developmental mathematics students in community colleges.

Math is the biggest obstacle to completion of a certificate or degree, with many students being placed in developmental math classes.

This partnership will support the development and implementation of the New Mathways Project, a system of new mathematics courses and student support services designed to help students earn college-level math credit more quickly. The TACC colleges have agreed to provide seed money to the Dana Center in developing the project. The intention is that this seed money will be supplemented by support from private donors, including foundations.

Developmental or remedial courses are intended to support underprepared students in improving their skills in math, reading, and writing, but there is growing concern that the current developmental education approach is not working, especially in math.

National data show failure rates of developmental math students to be as high as 59%. In Texas, students who are referred to developmental education are almost 50% less likely than nondevelopmental education students to transfer to a four-year institution of higher education or complete a degree with market value.

The New Mathways Project (www.utdanacenter.org/mathways) is a systemic approach to reforming developmental education that will enable students to take math courses that align with their majors and the requirements for future careers.

In developing programs that will help tens of thousands of community college students earn a degree or transfer to a four-year institution of higher education, the New Mathways Project speaks to the charge from the University of Texas at Austin's "Commission of 125": to be a university that is "the best in the world at creating a disciplined culture of excellence that generates intellectual excitement, transforms lives, and develops leaders."

The traditional developmental math sequence in most colleges is designed to prepare all students for calculus. However, there is increasing awareness that only students majoring in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) require calculus.

Research shows that the vast majority of students would be better prepared for their careers in business, nursing, teaching, and various liberal arts degrees by taking courses that prepare them to use and interpret data, understand finances, and understand and use the quantitative information presented to citizens and consumers in today's society.

Through the New Mathways Project, these students will have a choice of courses in statistics or quantitative literacy. Students in STEM programs will be served by a redesigned course sequence to prepare them for calculus.

There are many localized efforts to address this problem, but the partnership between TACC and the Dana Center is one of the first large-scale initiatives in the country.

"Faculty at community colleges do beautiful work to improve their local developmental education and broader mathematics programs," said Uri Treisman, the executive director of the Dana Center and a professor of mathematics and of public affairs at the University of Texas at Austin. "But we need systemic solutions to the problems of community college mathematics, and those solutions need to build on the good insights of people working to improve their local programs."

The new initiative brings together the state of Texas's 50 independent community colleges—all of which are represented by TACC—with the Dana Center. TACC is a nonprofit association that was formally created in 1947 to serve as a voice for all member colleges. The mission of the Dana Center, an organized research unit in the College of Natural Sciences at the University of Texas at Austin, is to strengthen American education systems to provide a reliable path to upward mobility for all students, with a primary focus on improving mathematics education.

"Our state's community colleges are very well tuned in to their area's educational and workforce needs," said Dr. Bill Holda, president of Kilgore College and TACC chair. "We see the opportunity to bring a pragmatic new approach to the way in which math education is delivered and have jointly committed the resources to do so. We view the New Mathways Project as a game changer with the potential to dramatically improve student success in college and in the workforce."

Dr. Richard Carpenter, chancellor of the Lone Star College System and TACC chair-elect, said "Clearly the 50 community colleges in Texas recognize the need to change developmental math education, and the New Mathways Project is a long-term commitment on our part to make students and Texas more successful."

In its recently released report, “Reclaiming the American Dream: Community Colleges and the Nation’s Future,” the American Association of Community Colleges calls for dramatic changes to the nation’s community colleges to ensure U.S. competitiveness.

According to Dr. Rey Garcia, president and CEO of TACC, this Texas partnership is unique because the colleges themselves are initiating a statewide effort versus the top-down mandates that have led to statewide efforts in other states. TACC and Dana Center leaders believe this will be a model for reform in higher education.

“The Dana Center is honored to work in partnership with the Texas Association of Community Colleges to design new pathways to and through community college mathematics,” said Treisman. “We are committed to building on TACC’s important developmental education improvement initiatives to dramatically increase the numbers of Texas community college students completing certificates and degrees.”

State leaders have indicated their support for this important initiative. “We are losing too many of our students because developmental education just isn’t working. If we want to achieve our participation and success goals of [the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board’s plan] *Closing the Gaps*, we need to reinvent developmental education from the ground up,” said Dr. Raymund Paredes, commissioner of higher education for the state of Texas. “I applaud TACC and the Dana Center for working together to reinvent math developmental education.”

The New Mathways Project will provide the course materials to all TACC members, along with materials for student success courses that will help students develop skills as learners, define and plan for their academic and career goals, and learn how college works. Through the project, the Dana Center and TACC will provide extensive support to institutions, faculty, and staff to successfully implement the program. At the state level, TACC, the Dana Center, and other key policy leaders will coordinate efforts to align policies to support this initiative.

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