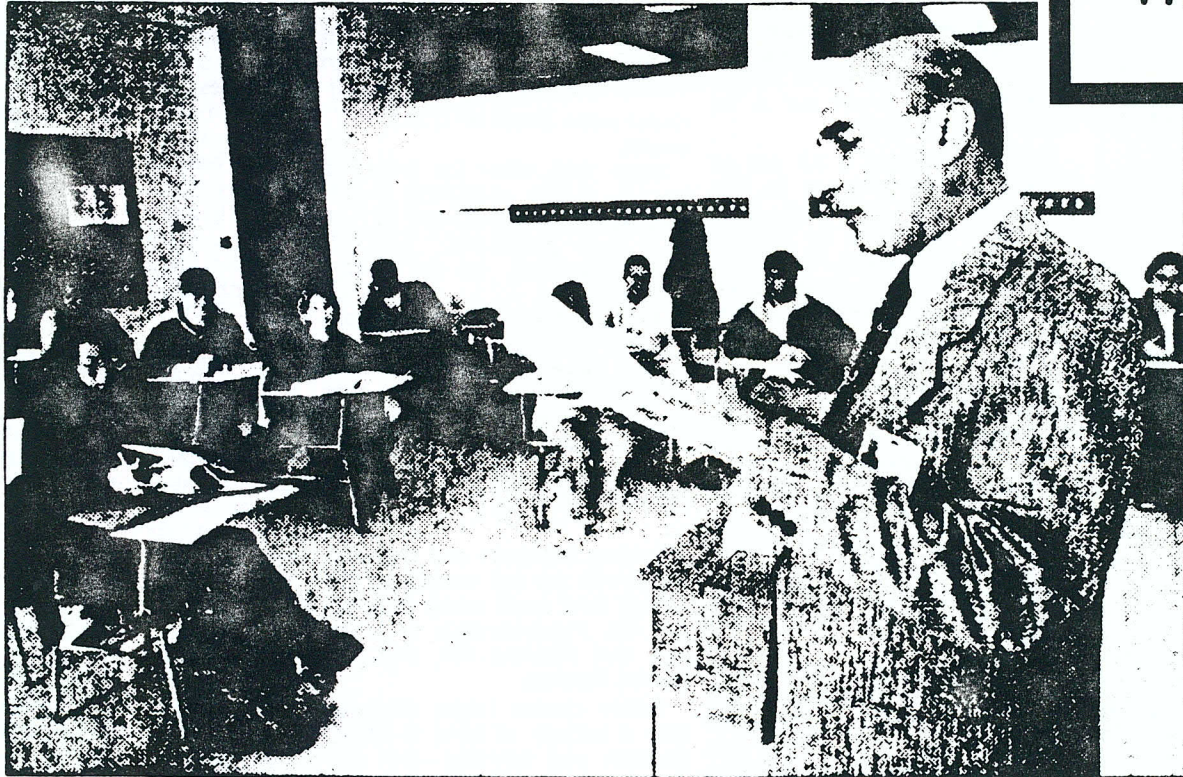


# Developmental programs help bridge the gap in college

Daley College  
in  
The News!



Tribune photo by James Mayo

Professor Vali Siadat teaches a math class at Daley College. Siadat conducted a study of developmental classes at the college level.

By Stefanie Dell'Aringa  
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

Each fall, new students arrive at college lacking the skills to succeed in their courses. Perhaps they have difficulty comprehending college-level texts or they struggle to solve mathematical problems.

Looking at a student's academic history and freshman-placement test scores often can show that he or she needs help.

For many, that help comes in the form of remedial education, or remediation, which refers to classes designed to raise students' proficiency in reading, writing and mathematics. Many schools, however, don't like to use the word "remedial" to describe programs or courses that are below college-level; instead, they refer to them as developmental classes or support programs.

Because high school graduates are not always prepared for college-level work, most colleges offer these classes.

"All community colleges offer remedial classes, and in fact, about three-fourths of colleges and universities offer them," said Vali Siadat, chairman of the math department and a professor of mathematics at Daley College, a two-year school and one of the City Colleges of Chicago.

"Recent statistics show that more than 50 percent of the enrollment in the colleges and universities is below the calculus level. This shows that there are a great many students who are in college doing remedial work, and this problem is especially paramount in the community colleges."

Karen Pittman, 21, of Chicago, is a freshman at Daley. She said she benefited from two of the school's remedial courses. She was placed in the classes because she scored low on college-placement tests.

Reading 125, Developmental Reading Skills II, prepared her for college-level English. "I learned more about how to write a paper correctly," she said. "I increased my vocabulary and I am reading a lot more magazines. I can pick up a book and breeze through it."

Math 110, which covers basic algebra, has challenged and excited Pittman so much that she is planning on a career in math education. She hopes to transfer to the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Pittman was one of 33 students in the math class, which is taught by professor Paul Musial. The class is part of the Keystone Project, an experimental program funded by the Gabriella and Paul Rosenbaum Foundation.

The Keystone Project is a teaching program that works to

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improve the students' study skills and concentration levels, in addition to focusing on mathematics. Attendance is mandatory, and homework must be completed.

To improve the students' ability to concentrate, there are daily quizzes with time limits.

"What I really notice is that we take quizzes every day, and that's different from my other classes," Pittman said.

Three years ago, a five-semester pilot study of the math program revealed that students'

math skills improved by 22 percentage points and reading comprehension improved by 12, even though reading was not the subject being taught.

"This teaching method affected all groups, from low achievers to high achievers," said Siadat, who conducted the pilot study with Yoram Sagher, a math professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Remedial math courses offered at Daley are Math 110, which is basic algebra, and Math 112, intermediate algebra. Remedial English courses

include English 100, Basic Writing Skills, and Reading 125.

There are 1,623 Daley students taking remedial classes out of a student body of 4,591.

Pittman feels her study skills have been improved by the math course: It has prepared her for the college-level Math 120 course. Her grades are above average.

"It's really fun when you start seeing A's and B's that you haven't seen before in a math class," she said. "It makes me feel really good and it makes me want to keep up the good work."

At Lewis University, a four-year college in Romeoville, students are given the chance to excel in the Success Program. There are 55 students—the maximum allowed—in the Success Program, out of 1,000 students overall.

Marcus Morton, 19, of Chicago is one student who has benefited from the program.

During the 1997-98 school year, when he was a freshman, he was offered additional support because of his low ACT scores. "My composite was 16 both times that I took it," said

Morton, now a sophomore. The nationwide average score for the ACT is 18.

After meeting with a college coordinator, he enrolled in courses that are part of the Success Program, such as Principles of Management, which focuses on time management and study skills, and Basic Composition, which is a springboard to college-level English writing courses.

"Basic Composition was an excellent class," Morton said. "It was a refresher, in a sense, and it prepared me for taking the qualifying exam to move to College Writing. I got an A in Basic Composition."

Morton received a 3.5 out of 4.0 grade-point average in his freshman year at Lewis—but, like many students, he needed help in specific areas. "My writing skills were not as sharp as they should have been, so they put me in Basic Composition," he said.

Lewis also offers ongoing support for students such as Morton through the Center for Academic and Personal Support, known as CAPS. About 600 students participate each year.

CAPS has computer-assisted instruction using remedial and developmental software programs in reading, writing and math.

The students can come in and work on their own, using the tutorial programs, Director Mercy Azeke said. "They can come as many times as they want and stay as long as they want," she said.

The program also offers counseling and academic-skills presentations that focus on skills such as goal-setting and time management.

"The support has been phenomenal," Morton said of CAPS. "They are there for you to receive any type of help you need."

DePaul University in Chicago offers the following developmental reading and writing courses: WRC101 (College Writing I), WRC102 (College Level Writing II), WRC107 (College Level Reading I) and WRC108 (College Level Reading II).

When students complete those courses they can advance to the standard freshman English courses, English 103 and English 104.

The developmental courses are taken by about 20 percent of the 1,482 freshmen, said Eileen Seifert, assistant director of writing programs, although not all the students take all four of them.

"I think that these courses are very successful, because what many students need is more reading and writing experience," Seifert said. "This gives them a supportive environment and they seem to do well."

DePaul students who are not prepared for college-level material also can enroll in a five-week summer course called the Bridge Program, which is taken the summer before freshman year. The program is offered to students accepted on a conditional basis because of low ACT scores.

Since 1985, when the program began, 1,628 students have enrolled. "Between 50 and 60 percent have graduated," said R. Janie Isackson, the program's director.

Students take a combined reading and writing course, a math course based on their level, and a Discover Chicago course that focuses on different aspects of the city, such as labor or music.

At Harper College, a two-year community college in Palatine,

incoming freshmen and new students who are not reading at the college level must enroll in Reading 090, Fundamentals of Reading, and Reading 099, Developmental Reading.

Before classes begin, students take a battery of tests in math, English and reading—the last "gives us a good sense of whether they are capable of handling college-level text," said Jean-Louise Gustafson, an associate professor in Harper's Learning Achievement Program.

"What we're finding is that students are really inexperienced

readers and they have read very little up until this point," Gustafson said.

Some students take both courses, which focus on comprehension and handling higher-level passages. In Reading 090, they read articles on contemporary issues as well as novels and non-fiction; in Reading 099, they read novels, biographies and expository writings.

Paola Capelo, 20, of Des Plaines, completed Reading 099 her freshman year and received a B. "Before when I used to read, I would read a passage and not understand it," said Capelo, a sophomore. "Now, I will go back to it and try to comprehend it, and if there's a word I don't know I'll look it up."

She noticed her speed improved as well: "I read a lot faster than I used to read. My reading skills really did improve."

Harper also helps students who are below college level in mathematics. Courses start with 8th-grade level basic arithmetic (Math 050) and go up to high-school level intermediate algebra (Math 080).

Students who receive low scores in math on their assessment tests must take developmental-math courses at Harper before they can advance to college-level math.

From 50 to 60 percent of the incoming students need the courses, said Dominick Magno, a professor in the department of mathematical sciences.

"We try to take students a whatever level they are at," he said, adding that the school has an open-door policy.

Right now, the school is looking at what can be done to expedite the developmental process for its students.

"What we're trying to do rather than saying, 'You've got to take arithmetic all over again is to be able to individually diagnose where their weaknesses are,'" Magno said.

The success of remediation courses can be measured by looking at the achievements of the college graduates who have taken them.

Pamela Patterson, who grew up in the Robert Taylor Home, a Chicago public housing development, graduated from DePaul in 1991 with a bachelor's degree in education.

Patterson, now 31, was told she could not be admitted to DePaul because of low ACT scores. The letter of rejection, which she received in 1985, is still fresh in her mind.

"I remember feeling pretty sorry for myself," she said.

Two weeks later, she received a letter announcing the Bridge Program, a pilot program in which she was allowed to enroll. "We had one writing course and one math course and we also had a study skills course that we'd go to on Saturday mornings," she said.

Today she is a 4th-grade teacher at Otis Elementary School on the city's West Side.

The Bridge Program, Patterson said, "was the best thing that ever happened to me."