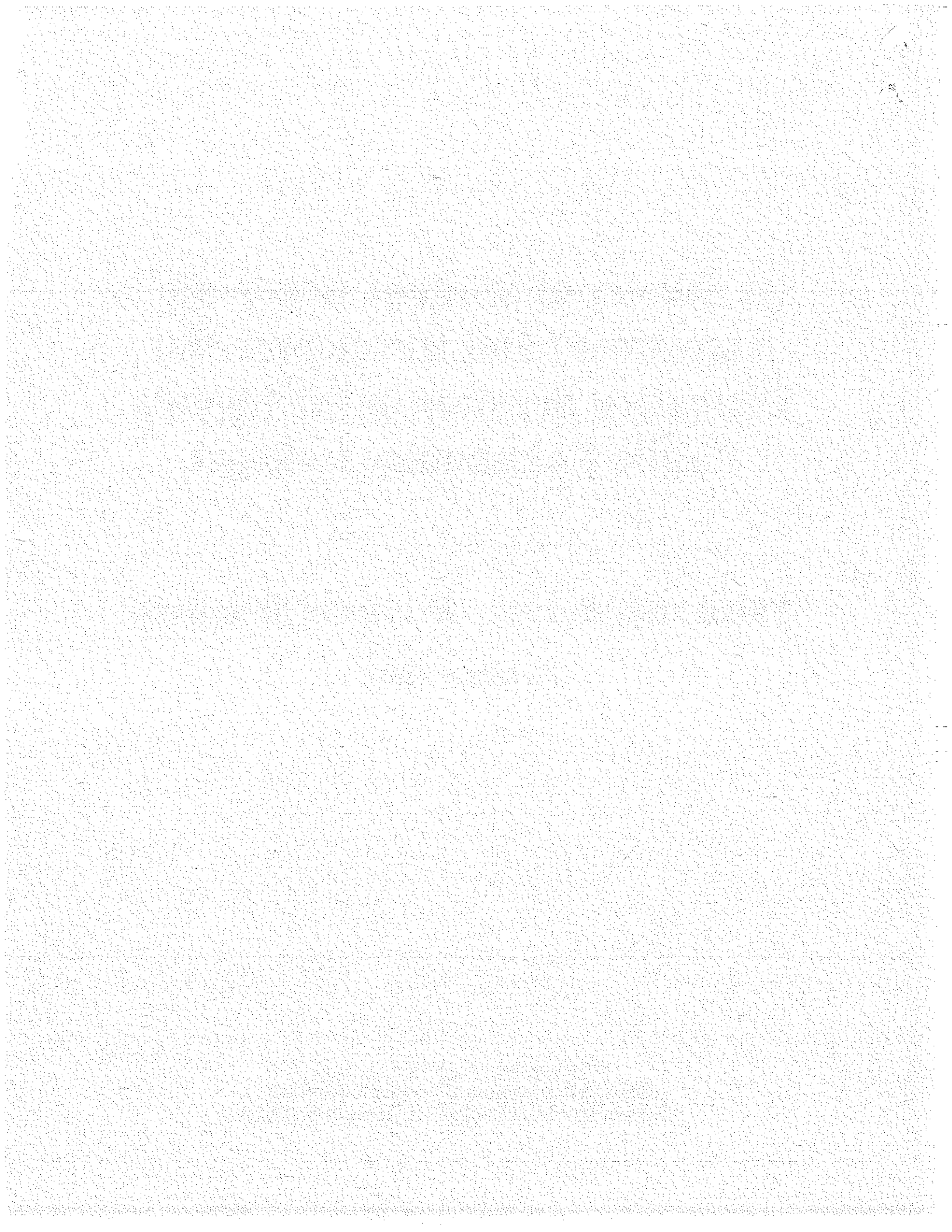# A Survey of Student Academic Assessment and Developmental Education Services in Michigan's Public Community Colleges

## Third State Survey - Executive Summary

### October 1997

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Background

The Michigan Department of Education along with the Michigan Developmental Education Consortium (MDEC) and representatives working in the area of Developmental Education, from community colleges within the State, conducted this third study of student academic assessment and developmental education in Michigan's pubic community colleges during March 1997. The first study was conducted in 1988 and the second in 1990. This study was funded under an Emerging Technologies Consortium grant through the Michigan Department of Education (Community College Services Unit), and in cooperation with the Michigan Developmental Education Consortium, the State Board for Public Community Colleges, and the State Board of Education.

For purposes of this study, the Developmental Education Study Committee modified the American Association of Community College's definition of developmental education. The working definition used by the committee is as follows:

## Definition of Developmental Education

The term *developmental education* is used in community college education to describe *courses and services designed to assist academically under prepared students in attaining the skills they need to be successful in college-level courses. These developmental courses and services commonly include diagnostic assessment and placement; academic preparedness which involves general and discipline-specific learning strategies, and skills to overcome affective barriers to learning. Target populations include, but are not limited to: recent high school graduates and returning adults lacking college-level skills, working adults employed in business and industry, English as a Second Language students, and other college students who may elect to participate in those courses and services.*

## Purpose

The main purpose of this study was to identify the current scope, nature, and practices of student academic assessment and developmental education services in Michigan's community colleges as perceived by college administrators, student services staff and faculty members directly responsible for developmental education. Additionally, the study was designed to assess the changes which have occurred over the past seven years. This study has attempted to examine and describe current practices of academic assessment and developmental education services offered by Michigan's public community colleges, those universities that are designated to act as a community college within their region (Ferris State, Lake Superior State, Michigan

Technological University and Northern Michigan University), and the tribal college, Bay Mills Community College.

It is anticipated that the findings will be helpful to college personnel who wish to review what other colleges in the state are doing in regards to developmental education. It will also help them establish benchmarks that they can utilize in order to measure their own progress within the area of developmental education.

## Nature of Study

This is a study from the college perspective. It bridges academic and occupational education. Four meetings were conducted in Lansing during the spring and summer of 1997. The Developmental Education Study Committee met to: (1) discuss and develop the focus and content of the survey instrument used for this third study; (2) approve the completed survey; (3) review the data gathered; and (4) determine the best methods of reporting the data.

Thirty-three surveys were distributed with a total of thirty (30) being completed and returned for tabulation and analyses. Thus, the number *thirty* serves as the baseline for all percentage data in this study.

## Focus

The study focused on the following: (1) institutional practices and policies, (2) assessment practices, (3) placement practices, (4) demographic information, (5) developmental course/ service offerings, (6) measurement of student academic achievement, (7) general practices and strategies, (8) retention practices, and (9) successful outcomes (as perceived by college personnel). The following is a summary of major findings, conclusions, and recommendations for each of the nine areas covered in the survey.

## Institutional Practices and Policies

**Major Findings/Trends:**

- Twenty-seven percent (8) of the colleges surveyed have a centralized developmental education department. Of those with centralized departments, 75% (6) are community colleges and 25% (2) are universities.

- Ninety percent (27) of the colleges allow credit for developmental courses; however, only 60% (18) permit the grades from such courses to be included in the computation of student grade point averages (G.P.A.). This reflects a 14% decrease from 1990 when 21 of the institutions allowed such grades to be included in a student's G.P.A.

- Fifty-seven percent (17) of the colleges that responded share data with feeder high schools concerning the progress of developmental education students.

- Forty percent of the colleges (12) develop specific initiatives in developmental education with business and industry.

- Two-thirds of the colleges receive most of their funding for developmental services from institutional operations. Ten percent (3) receive a majority of the funding from federal and/or state sources.

## Conclusions:

♦ Colleges seem to favor a decentralized organizational model in the delivery of developmental education.

♦ Colleges show a continuous variety in the approaches they use in awarding developmental education credit.

## Assessment Practices

### Major Findings/Trends:

- Academic assessment is required by 77% (23) of the colleges for full-time credit students and student enrolled in programs.

- Forty-three percent (13) of the colleges indicated that assessment is required of all students regardless of class status.

- Most institutions use a combination of standardized and institutionally developed instruments to assess new students.

## Conclusion:

♦ Assessment has increased in complexity both in terms of the variety of assessment instruments utilized and the various combinations of methods employed to measure student success.

## Placement Practices

### Major Findings/Trends:

- Ninety-three percent (27) of the colleges have mandatory assessment and 60% (18) have mandatory placement for writing.

- Ninety percent (27) of the colleges have mandatory assessment and 40% (12) have mandatory placement for reading.

- Ninety percent (27) of the colleges have mandatory assessment and 50% (15) have mandatory placement for mathmetical computation.

- Sixty-seven percent (20) of the colleges have mandatory assessment and 37% (11) have mandatory placement for algebra.

- Sixty-three percent (19) of the colleges have prerequisites to be met before allowing a student to enroll in college-level courses.

### Conclusions:

- Mandatory assessment and placement have increased since 1990.

- Colleges have established institutionally-specific criteria for placing students in developmental education courses.


## Demographic Information

### Major Findings/Trends:

- Ninety-seven percent (29) of the colleges are prepared to work with students who are academically disadvantaged and/or under prepared.

- One-hundred percent (30) are prepared to work with developmental education students who are disabled, as compared to 87% (26) of the colleges in 1990.

- The top three needs requiring special attention for developmental education students include: study skills, basic skills, and critical thinking/reasoning skills (as cited by 93%, 90%, and 89% of the colleges, respectively). There has been a 20% increase in the number of colleges that address these skills since 1990.

## Conclusion:

◆ Colleges offer developmental education services to a larger percent of the student population than they did in 1990, with a focus on basic skills, study skills, and critical thinking/ reasoning skills.


## Developmental Course/Service Offerings

### Major Findings/Trends:

- The three most preferred delivery systems are: (1) classroom [23 colleges]; (2) combination of classroom, assistance center, and tutoring [20 colleges]; and (3) tutoring [14 colleges]. There appears to be an increase in the use of the classroom setting supplemented with learning assistance (e.g. one-to-one instruction) since 1990.

- Developmental education courses are provided at off-campus sites by 77% (23) of the colleges and services are provided by 53% (16) of the colleges.

- A wide variety of academic support services are provided for developmental education students with the most popular services being: (a) support services for students with disabilities (97%), (b) peer tutoring (80%), and (c) academic advising ( 70%).

### Conclusion:

◆ Developmental course offerings and services have increased in scope, variety and flexibility since the 1990 study.


## Measurement of Student Academic Achievement

### Major Findings/Trends:

- Eighty-seven percent (26) of the colleges have a system for monitoring developmental education students' progress within developmental education courses.

- Forty-three percent (13) of the colleges track their developmental education students' progress throughout their stay at their institutions.

- Ninety-three percent (28) of the colleges have strategies for on-going classroom assessment integrated with instruction for developmental education courses.

- The three most popular classroom methods for assessment methods are: (1) writing assignments (97%), (2) testing within course context (93%), and (3) quizzes (93%).

## Conclusion:

♦ The number of institutions having a system for monitoring developmental education students' progress within developmental education courses increased from 13 in 1990 to 26 in 1997.

## General Practices and Strategies

## Major Findings/Trends:

- Ninety-three percent (28) of the colleges reported that they have implemented innovative techniques in teaching developmental education courses since 1990.

- Eighty-two percent (23) have indicated that they have witnessed the expected changes from those innovations.

- Forty-seven percent (14) of the colleges indicated that their developmental education programs have gone through major revisions and/or enhancements within the areas of curriculum and assessment since 1990.

- Eighty-seven percent (26) of the colleges reported that their institutions adopted the following practices to measure the effectiveness of developmental education (programs, services, and courses):

  (a) annual reports (21 colleges)
  (b) longitudinal tracking of student skills (12)
  (c) satisfaction surveys (18)
  (d) enrollment trend studies (19)
  (e) focused research [ad hoc] (4)

## Conclusions:

♦ Changes, revisions, and innovations in developmental education courses, activities, and services reflect recommendations made in the 1990 survey.

♦ Colleges have implemented a variety of innovations in developmental education programs, courses, services and evaluation practices.

## Retention Practices

### Major Findings/Trends:

- Fifty-seven percent (17) of the colleges have implemented innovative developmental education courses, activities, and/or services since 1990 which have been designed to increase the retention of developmental education students.

- Ten of the 17 colleges reported that they have witnessed the expected changes.

- Seventy percent (21) of the colleges have created retention teams or committees that keep their campus abreast of retention concerns/issues. (There was no mention of *retention teams* in the 1990 survey.)

### Conclusion:

- The emergence of retention teams seems to reflect an increase in campus-wide concern for total student progress rather than focusing solely upon how well a student does in developmental education courses.


## What Works

### Major Findings/Trends:

- Eighty-three percent (25) of the colleges use a pre- and post-test comparison to measure and assess the effectiveness of developmental education courses.

- Sixty-seven percent (20) use surveys to assess the effectiveness of developmental education services.

- Sixty percent (18) of the colleges stated that many of their developmental education students **still have unmet needs,** with the top three reasons being affective and financial in nature, i.e. lack of support for education from students' families, no child care, and transportation.

### Conclusion:

- New approaches for delivering developmental education courses and services continue to be developed in an effort to meet the needs of developmental education students. However, at this point, most colleges are formally assessing and reporting that there are still affective/ socio-economic needs of developmental education students that are not being met and are, perhaps, outside the control of the college.

# CURRENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on results of the 1997 survey, the following recommendations are proposed:

- A second survey should include a section dealing with the college's overall budget in relation to the number of developmental education students in order to help better define some of the true cost of developmental education.

- Colleges should continue to evaluate assessment and placement practices to ensure appropriate student placement.

- State-wide forums should be provided so that all those involved and concerned with developmental education have a forum by which they are able to share issues, concerns, and progress.

- Monitoring and tracking the success of developmental education students should be continued, expanded, and encouraged in order to better determine the impact developmental education has upon total college success as well as graduation rates.

- The State Department of Education should provide a listserve/website where institutions can describe and share innovative developmental education programs.

- A common set of limited criteria to identify successful retention practices may also be useful.

- Research should continue and be conducted on a state-wide level.

# FUTURE STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS

This particular study was not intended to be a comparison with the 1988 and 1990 surveys; however, questions were compared whenever relevant. When comparing current data with past survey results, it must be noted that many discrepancies surfaced regarding how institutions interpreted several questions (e.g., *assessment, faculty experience, and developmental education student population*). In order to ensure consistency in future studies and eliminate confusion, the Developmental Education Survey Committee agreed to focus future studies on five core questions centering on the following:

- the definition of each institution's developmental education students
- the numbers of students in the state who are actually served by developmental education courses along with the demographics of those students
- assessment (formal and informal) and assessment instruments
- placement practices, specifically in reading, English, and math courses
- outcome evaluation of developmental education students, courses, and services.

A smaller committee, consisting of five representatives who served on the Developmental Education Study Committee for 1990 will develop these five core questions at a future date.

This will provide baseline data and will ensure more consistency in data collection. It will also allow developmental educators and administrators to anticipate and collect data for the next survey (in the year 2000).