

Big Bend Community College

Focus Group with Developmental Math Students

November 2009

The purpose of the focus group was to get students' input on what was helping students succeed in their developmental math classes and to learn what students believe will improve students' success and progress through the developmental math sequence. Big Bend's Achieving the Dream Coach and Data Facilitator facilitated a Developmental Math Focus Group with current developmental math students.

Current practices that help students in developmental math

- The Math Lab Resource Center Coordinator and math lab tutors are great. The Coordinator is knowledgeable and helpful. She likes helping people and gives you personal attention.
- Students who have Elluminate as a component of their class love it. They like being able to communicate with their instructor and review the lecture after class.
- Lecture classes work well for the majority of students; although a few preferred lab classes with a prescribed timeline and benchmarks.
- Students who had Supplemental Instruction as part of their class thought it helped.
- Review packets and worksheets are very helpful to students.

Potential changes students suggested to improve developmental math success

Placement

- The placement test should be mandatory, but needs to be improved to better place students according to their abilities.
- Some students are placed too high and take a lot of class time asking questions, putting the rest of the class behind on current material.
- Provide a refresher course prior to taking the placement test. This would help students who have had math previously, improve their placement.
- Students would also like to have the option of watching the lectures through Elluminate as review for the placement test.

Instruction

- Test students on their learning styles and match them with teachers who have an appropriate teaching style.
- Train instructors to be able to use multiple ways of explaining a concept.
- Publicize the two pathways to take developmental math. Some students need slower paced classes. Make Pre-college Math 91, 92, and 93 courses an alternative choice to Pre-college math 95 and 99 courses. Most students in the focus group did not know the 91, 92, 93 series was an option.
- Ask students to evaluate each instructor in each class every quarter.
- Allow students more time to take tests.
- Make lectures available online to supplement classroom lectures – allowing students to review the material when they study.
- Provide night classes in developmental math.

Resources

- Provide a list of student resources at the beginning of class. Including; the math lab, Tutor.com, SSS, Elluminate, etc. Resources have to be available for students with family obligations that limit the amount of time they have on campus to go to the math lab or to meet with tutors.
- Provide all math instructors with an assistant or someone in class to help (SI, tutor, etc.).

Other Comments

- Reevaluate pre-requisites for occupational courses. Change the requirements to get into some classes (i.e. Biology, Chemistry, etc.) to better accommodate student schedules, so students are not held back by these lower math classes—also, with many required classes only being offered one quarter, students don't have any "wiggle room".
- Students have the perception that instructors do not enjoy teaching lower than college level math.

Conclusion

The placement test was viewed as necessary to place students in appropriate courses, but students wanted a short refresher course or other study tools to help them revive their math skills before they took the placement test. Current resources were seen as helpful and must be widely publicized. Students who were in classes with an Elluminate or Supplemental Instruction component thought the resources were helpful and should be expanded to all developmental math classes. Students believed there should be a slower paced option for developmental math for the students who need more time on the material.