

## Then and Now: The Early Years of Developmental Education

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Postsecondary institutions throughout the nation's history have provided developmental education and learning assistance programs meet the academic standards expected of admitted college students. "It can be asserted accurately that bridging the academic preparation gap has been a constant in the history of American higher education and that the controversy surrounding it is an American educational tradition" (Brier, 1984, p. 2).

The author of this article identified six phases of developmental education in American history.. Each phase is naturally interconnected with the social history that surrounds and interact with them. The succeeding phase included more student subpopulations that needed support in higher education through developmental education. This article will explore the first three phases of developmental education history to provide a context for today's programs and services.

Degler observed that social change is more likely to occur as a practical response to specific events rather than as the implementation of a well-developed ideology (Chafe, 1991, p. 172). Major events such as world wars, major migrations of people, economic trends, and federal legislation will play important roles with helping to foster changes in post secondary education. These currents of history will also naturally sweep developmental education in an evolutionary development as it adapts to meet immediate needs and survives the political forces that will war against its existence. Developmental education expanded its service to more students not due to an intelligent plan, but as a natural response to growing needs by an increasingly diverse heterogeneous college student body.

DIFFERENT PHASES OF DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION FOR  
COLLEGE STUDENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

Time Period	Name(s) Commonly Used With Activities	Students Predominantly Served During This Time Period
Mid 1600s to 1820s	Tutoring	Privileged White males
1820s to 1860s	Precollegiate preparatory academy and tutoring	Privileged White males
1860s to Mid 1940s	Remedial education classes within college preparatory programs and tutoring	Mostly White males
Mid 1940s to Early 1970s	Remedial education classes integrated within the institution, tutoring, and compensatory education	Traditional White male students, nontraditional males and females, and federal legislative priority groups: first-generation college, economically-disadvantaged, and students of color
Early 1970s to Mid 1990s	Developmental education, learning assistance, tutoring, and Supplemental Instruction	Previous groups listed above and an increase in older students who are returning to education or attending postsecondary education for first time
Mid 1990s to Present	Developmental education with expansion into enrichment activities, classes and programs	Previous groups listed above and an increase in number of general students who want to deepen mastery of academic content material

Phase One: Education for the Privileged White Male, Mid 1600s to the 1820s

The first colleges such as Harvard (established 1636), William and Mary (1693), and Yale (1701) had as their main purpose the replication of postsecondary education from Europe. Among the goals of such an education was to preserve newly imported European cultural norms, training of the clergy, and creation of the new ruling elite. With the late creation of the U.S. federal government during this period, there was little involvement with postsecondary education other than to not interfere with it. Few members of American society aspired to postsecondary education since few occupations required such additional training. Most young adults followed the family with apprenticeships in trades or continuing their participation with the family farm.

### Focus on Privileged White Male Students

The number of students enrolled in postsecondary education was quite modest, most of these students were preparing for the clergy. Nearly all students were white males from privileged families. Concurrently a few women attended “finishing schools” to prepare them for marriage to men of high social standing (Roueche & Roueche, 1993, p. 23). Higher education would remain primarily a wealthy Caucasian male enterprise until the American Civil War.

This focus on creating a new ruling elite in the young American republic is illustrated by a speaker at a seventeenth-century Harvard commencement address. The speaker was pleased that Puritan settlers had established Harvard; otherwise:

The ruling class would have been subjected to mechanics, cobblers, and tailors, the gentry would have been overwhelmed by fellows of the baser sort, the sewage of Rome, the dregs of an illiterate plebs which judgeth much from emotion, little from truth. (Miller, 1939, p. 84)

Though official college admission policy was only to accept students from a wide diversity of socio-economic backgrounds, nearly all students who attended Harvard were white male students from wealthy parents of the privileged class. High tuition costs effectively excluded nearly all other students. There were some very limited attempts of providing access to other student populations. Approximately ten percent of the students at Harvard were from families of artisans, seamen, and servants. These students had their tuition paid either through work or assessments on the more wealthy students (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976, pp. 39-40).

This practice of admitting students to satisfy political or public relations purposes without providing the corresponding academic support programs essential for academic success and eventual graduation would be a pattern often replicated throughout the history of American higher education. Institutions could claim political and public relation victories by admitting students without publicly revealing the dismal record of graduation rates. The American press and public opinion seldom demanded this accountability until the 1970s with the rise of the education accountability movement that began in elementary and secondary education with the publication of the “Nation At Risk” report on the deplorable state of educational outcomes in public education.

There were few advocates for African-American education among the Caucasian aristocracy and there are no reports of all-Black schools in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century:

. . . the doors of wisdom were not only not open, they were shut tight and designed to remain that way . . . by the end of the colonial period there was a well-developed ideology of race inferiority to justify that situation and ensure that it would stand firm against all the heady rhetoric of the [American] Revolution. (Cremin, 1970, p. 412)

### Tutorial Assistance

Developmental education in America was created in response to the creation of admission requirements at post secondary institutions. Nearly all students seeking admission to college were unable to be fully admitted due to deficiencies in foreign

language requirements of Latin and Greek. This is not surprising considering the dismal or nonexistence status of public education.

Students seeking admission to Eaton or Oxford in England would sometimes attend a “dame school” to prepare them for the rigorous college admission’s test. These boarding schools were small tutorial centers run by educated women of high social standing. In colonial times, some Virginia aristocratic families sent their children to such schools in England to prepare for the admission tests at American postsecondary institutions. This practice was modified by some American clergymen taking on the same role, by that eliminating the need for children to leave the country for such academic preparation programs.

Precollege academic assistance for most students at Harvard and Yale commonly consisted of private tutors who prepared them for college entrance examinations of Greek and Latin along with evidence of good moral character:

In 1642 Harvard required its freshman students to be able to understand and read at sight some Latin author of the difficulty of Cicero, be able to speak Latin in prose and poetry, and be able to decline Greek nouns and conjugate Greek verbs. (Butts & Cremin, 1953, p. 122)

In the mid 1700s Yale required proficiency on an arithmetic exam besides the above requirements and other postsecondary institutions soon followed. By the late 1800s beyond the original trio of Latin, Greek, and mathematics, an additional trio of subject areas were added for assessment: history, geography, and English (Broome, 1903). If students had not attended Latin grammar schools, another common academic preparation program at Yale was for a prospective student to stay with a minister for private tutoring until the student felt that he had been sufficiently readied for the college entrance exam (Cowie, 1936, p. 5). This was on a small scale a similar experience to the previously described dame schools in England.

Review of many college admissions catalogs from this era suggest that postsecondary admissions standards have increased their rigor as the public elementary and secondary school movement spread across the U.S. Since most postsecondary institutions at this time were elitist institutions that sought to selectively admit only a small segment of potential postsecondary students, college admission standards were generally higher than the skill and mastery level of average high school graduates. This historic imbalance of expectancy and reality has ensured the continuing needs for developmental education and other forms of academic assistance.

Once admitted to Harvard, most students continued to receive tutoring since the most assigned readings and textbooks were written in Latin and many college lectures were delivered in the same language by the professors. Even among the more wealthy White families, verbal and written competency in Latin was unusual. Therefore, it is not surprising that Harvard University was also the first postsecondary institution in America to require remedial studies for most of its freshman class of students (Boylan & White, 1987).

Many of these early tutors were low-paid members of the faculty. It was common experience among these early colleges that salaries were very low for all the teaching staff. “Indeed, tutors were paid so little that except by remaining celibate during their tutorship they could not have made ends meet” (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976, p. 37).

Gradually this role of tutor began to be assumed by older students at the institution. For example, at Princeton University some graduate students were given the responsibility and title of a preceptor to conduct informal study groups that encouraged students to master the lecture material more deeply and engage in further academic discourse (Maxwell, 1979, p. 59).

### Changing College Admissions Standards

Economics intervened regarding academic admission policies during the late 1700s. Due to the social norm of only considering Caucasian male students from families of high prestige who often possessed little secondary education, most postsecondary institutions in the 1600s until the American Revolution found it in their financial interest to admit students who were less prepared academically since they had the student fees for enrollment purposes. The president of Vassar College stated that “the range of student achievement extends to a point lower than any scale could measure” (Brier, 1984, p. 2). By the time of the American Revolution, institutions began to differentiate themselves by academic preparation levels of the incoming college students plus their officially stated mission statement. Institutions such as Amherst and Williams were founded to accommodate students who could not afford nor be accepted by Harvard and Yale due to their lower academic preparation levels (Casazza & Silverman, 1996). Unofficial segregation policies and procedures were established based on stereotypes of perceived academic inabilities by students and to exclude others that the institutional power elite did not favor such as females and students of color. The students at Williams were described by Nathaniel Hawthorne as “rough, brown featured, schoolmaster-looking, half-bumpkin, half-scholar, in black, ill-cut broadcloth” (Rudolph, 1956, p. 47). These assumptions, based on racial and class prejudices by key college policy makers besides inconsistent anecdotal information, would foster differentiation among postsecondary institutions for generations to come.

Institutions that were unable to create academic preparatory departments for students to attend before admission to the institution commonly required students who were judged to be underprepared to enroll concurrently in remedial classes along with their college graduation credit courses and to meet regularly with tutors (Brier, 1984). This placed increased pressure upon the students to both master foundation knowledge plus understand new material upon which it was based.

Phase one of developmental education was characterized by the need to provide tutoring for nearly all students both to prepare for college admissions tests and also survive the rigorous college courses. The student body was very homogeneous as it was dominated by White male students from privileged socio-economic backgrounds.

### Phase Two: Rise of the Precollegiate Preparatory Academy, 1820s to 1860s

#### Expansion of Postsecondary Education

With the increasing dispersion of the American population westward, the need to support the concurrent expansion of postsecondary institutions throughout the country was essential for a variety of reasons (Van Deusen, 1966). Many of the new towns needed the same components that suggested civilization to the new inhabitants:

churches, businesses, public education, and a postsecondary institution. The quality of these new institutions, especially those located on the western frontier, were at best uneven and often worse (Blum, et. al., 1968, pp. 478-479). These new colleges drew upon potential students in the area, therefore demanding the provision of remedial education courses and other forms of academic assistance to meet the needs of these academically underprepared students.

However, with the poor or nonexistence of secondary and sometimes primary education, many of these new potential college students could barely read and write (Craig, 1997). Some researchers have noted that the number of those who provided and the number who received tutorial assistance was nearly identical to the number of teaching faculty and their enrolled students (Brier, 1984). This helps to document the massive involvement of developmental education with the entire educational enterprise operating at the postsecondary level.

This great debate over the rigor of the college curriculum and the participation of underprepared college students during this time delayed the widespread introduction of college-level remedial courses and the creation of the academic preparatory academy. Strong proponents of elitism in postsecondary education prevailed temporarily with the argument. Harvard University's leadership in permitting elective courses in place of some required curriculum offerings allowed the introduction of remedial courses for selection by college students. While Harvard University's curriculum change in the early 1800s was not designed with developmental education specifically in mind, the result was the same. It would take several decades before the developmental education course elective options would be made available for the students. Before this, there was no opportunity to select elective remedial courses since the fixed curriculum prescribed the same slate of classical courses for all students to take, no matter their unique individual needs for development of improved learning strategies and mastery of fundamental academic content material.

There was a growing reaction against the elitist view of only offering a fixed and prescribed curriculum for all college students. With the creation of a more flexible curriculum with provision for selection among approved elective courses, developmental education became a practical option for many students. As colleges began to open their doors to a more diverse student body of varying academic preparation levels, the provision of opportunity to enroll in remedial courses was essential to meet their need and also provide these courses for the traditional study body who also had similar unmet academic needs. This model of a flexible curriculum would be adopted by most institutions in America. A Massachusetts legislator complained:

A college should be open to boys who seek specific learning for a specific purpose. It should give the people the practical instruction that they want, and not a classical-literary course suitable only for an aristocracy. (Morison, 1936, p. 287)

This value clash led to a variety of innovations and reforms within higher education. One of those was the preparatory studies department.

### Creation of Preparatory Academies or Departments

In 1830, New York University (New York City) created an early prototype of an academic preparatory academy. This academic unit provided instruction in math, physical science, philosophy, and English literature (Dempsey, 1985). However, the main focus was on the acquisition of basic academic content knowledge and not cognitive learning strategies that are often prerequisite for mastery of new academic content material as identified by cognitive psychologists of today.

Tutorial programs were the common forms of academic enrichment and support at the most prestigious institutions such as Harvard and Yale. As larger numbers of academically underprepared students were admitted to the secondary and tertiary tier postsecondary institutions, it was recognized by many college administrators that a special department was necessary to accommodate and meet the academic needs of these students. For these less selective institutions, the number of underprepared students sometimes outnumbered the “regular” college admits. For example, at the University of Wisconsin in 1865, only 41 of 331 admitted students were in “regular” college-level courses that counted toward graduation requirements (Shedd, 1932, pp. 136-137). This is expected since the quality of primary and secondary education was very uneven, or even missing, in many parts of the United States. Colleges were often forced to provide instruction in the basic skills of spelling, writing, geography, and mathematics since they were the only venue for such organized instruction (Brier, 1984). Instruction in these basic content areas for the underprepared students often lengthened the undergraduate bachelor’s academic degree to six years or more (Casazza & Silverman, 1996). When examining the length of time taken for students to successfully complete their undergraduate degrees, it is not common practice for the experience to be completed in four consecutive years. However, in recent years some policy makers have leveled criticism at developmental education since it contributes to a longer time to complete the academic degree due to the enrollment in remedial courses.

Most researchers cite that the first modern developmental education program was established at the University of Wisconsin in 1849. The Department of Preparatory Studies focused on instructing students in the basics of study skills. Remedial courses in reading, writing, and arithmetic were provided for students to enable them to succeed with graduation credit courses. This was the first systematic program to accommodate and ready underprepared students. The program was established since the number of tutors was not sufficient to meet the academic needs presented by many members of the student body. Most of the students at the University were enrolled in the program. Of the 331 students enrolled at the institution, 290 were enrolled in one or more remedial courses in the Preparatory Studies department (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976). This Wisconsin model of academic assistance and developmental education was adopted for use at other institutions across the U.S. (Brier, 1984). The department persisted until the 1880 when it was disbanded due to internal political battles rather than charges of ineffectual outcomes for participating students.

In the mid 1800s, Vassar College created an academic preparatory department to deal with students who lacked academic preparation for college courses. Faculty appointments to teach preparatory classes and the students who were enrolled in the precollegiate program grew quickly in number, by 1876 more than 45 percent of all

Vassar students were enrolled in one or more remedial classes in the academy. The high percentage of student enrollment and corresponding level of faculty staffing drew scorn from many traditional faculty members who taught college-level courses. Increased curriculum articulation and discussion with the major feeder high schools to Vassar helped to develop more effective college-bound high school curriculums. The overall improvement of the quantity and quality of secondary schools across America was a dominant theme of the latter portion of the 19th century. By the turn of the century the academic preparatory academy was ended at Vassar due to the perception that most of high school students who applied for admission to Vassar had sufficient academic preparation (Roberts, 1986), though there were no documented studies to validate that assumption. This same assumption has been advanced again a century later in the 1980s and 1990s with the perceived improvements in high school curriculum standards. Policy makers have made the too often erroneous assumption that higher quality instruction in high school would automatically enable most newly admitted college students easily meeting or exceeding academic standards of the college professors. While the quality of high school instruction may have risen, generally the academic expectation levels of many college professors had risen at a faster pace, continuing or even widening the gulf between expectancy by the institution and the reality presented by the majority of new students.

The movement to establish academic preparatory departments in most postsecondary institutions accelerated quickly by the end of the nineteenth century. Canfield (1889) estimated that more than 80 percent of the nearly 400 postsecondary institutions in the U.S. had established some sort of college preparatory program by 1889. These academic preparation departments became important in bridging the gap between the academic preparation of many high school youth and college-level entrance expectations (Clemont, 1899). A review of college admission documents suggest that the further west that the institution was geographically found, the lower the academic entrance requirements for the institution. In 1894 more than 40 percent of the 238,000 first-year college students were enrolled in college preparatory courses (Ignash, 1997).

The concurrent challenges of prevalent poor secondary school academic preparation for all but the most privileged students and uneven policies for college admission decisions at many postsecondary institutions created an academically underprepared first-year class of college students. Lax college admission criteria were partly due to the need to sufficiently fund postsecondary institutions since there was low financial support from the state and federal government for ongoing budgetary needs. While institutions may have received land and funds to initially construct the campus, ongoing governmental funds for salaries and expansion were often lacking. Many of these new institutions had insufficient financial capital to absorb the fiscal needs presented by academically underprepared students who needed extensive academic assistance and a wide program of remedial courses. These college preparatory programs had the unanticipated beneficial consequence of serving as models for secondary school instruction across the country and serving as their surrogate until secondary schools were fully developed by their local communities (Boylan, 1988).

Another factor which increased the need for academic preparatory programs was the increasing rigor of the college curriculum. Expectation levels often increased faster than many secondary schools could prepare the students to meet or exceed assumed core curriculum mastery levels. College courses which were formerly reserved for the upper division of the undergraduate curriculum were now expected by many postsecondary institutions to be capstones for high school. For example, in 1720 geometry was a senior-level course at Yale. By 1743 the course was placed at the sophomore level and then it was part of the freshman curriculum in 1825. In the mid 1850s the expectation was that the course was to have been mastered in high school (Wyatt, 1992). This increasing expectancy level continued to fuel the need for college remedial courses and academic preparatory programs.

Another factor increasing the need for preparatory programs was the increased access to the printed word for students. While most of college education in the 1600s and 1700s was presented through an oral tradition of the lecture and recitation, during the 1800s the library and its holdings became a primary area for knowledge acquisition. New subject areas in the humanities and the sciences during the 1880s required reading large volumes of print materials. Deficient reading skills of many students now became exposed and the need for their remediation was amplified (Dempsey, 1985).

An alternative to the academic preparatory programs at the college-level was attendance at separate private "tutoring schools." These were private enterprises that operated remotely from the college campus and provided private tutoring for an additional fee to students. Tutoring schools fulfilled several basic purposes: tutoring assistance for students who were currently enrolled in college; intensive development in entry-level college academic material; and preparation for college entrance examinations. Cascadilla School in Ithaca, New York is an example of such an institution. An additional purpose of these schools was to provide college faculty members a venue to earn extra income to supplement their meager salaries provided by the colleges. Professors Wait and MacKoon from Cornell University founded the Cascadilla School. These schools became the precursors of the highly-profitable private schools such as Sylvan Learning Systems and Kaplan Test Preparation Program (Brier, 1984, p. 4).

The importance and degree of institutionalization of academic preparatory academies was documented by a study that found that by 1895, nearly 40 percent of all college students were directly admitted from the institution's own college preparatory department (Rudolph, 1977, p. 158). It appears that many colleges had developed such academic preparatory schools to prepare future college students for successful admission and persistence toward college graduation. This would therefore enable these institutions to economically survive through payment of tuition and fees by these formerly academically underprepared students. The poor quality or nonexistence of public high schools created a demand for some college-bound preparation program:

This symbiotic relationship between the local college and the function of providing secondary education served as a model for similar relationships during contemporary times. Considerable attention was generated by the press regarding the formal relationship established by Boston University and the local public school district in the 1990s. The school board contracted with the college to help manage part of the school district. Actually similar examples occurred nearly 100 years earlier in various

locations throughout the country between secondary and postsecondary institutions who formed partnerships for mutual benefit.

A final reason for the creation of the academic preparatory academies was an indirect economic benefit to the institution through enrollment of a new group of students. There have been several periods in American higher education when campus administrators enrolled academically underprepared students who normally would not have been admitted to the institution, but the institution modified admission standards to enroll this new class of students to receive their tuition and other fees. This decision to pursue developmental education students for recruitment to the institution most recently occurred in the 1970s when colleges sought to replace the former college students from the post World War II baby boom generation. During this time the colleges sought to attract and retain a variety of student subpopulations often overlooked in the past: women, first generation to attend college, academically-underprepared, and older adults returning to college or attending for the first time. In the one hundred years before the Civil War, nearly 700 institutions were closed due to budgetary concerns (Wyatt, 1992). It was not unusual for the business and academic interests of the academy to conflict with one another. While it was in the financial interest of the institutions to admit a diverse student body who were able to pay the tuition and fees, the prevailing campus culture might be in opposition to providing the level of academic support services needed for their long-term academic success and eventual graduation from college.

It appears that the first time that colleges aggressively pursued the academically-underprepared for recruitment was during the American Civil War. Economic and social changes in American society in both the North and South created by the Civil War had a significant impact upon the expansion of developmental education with many colleges and universities. Many male students failed to seek admission or left college during the Civil War to join their respective armies. Many colleges in both the North and South sought to replace them and their student tuition payments by expanding their institution's academic preparatory departments by recruiting underage students who could not yet serve as soldiers. For example in the North, the number of students enrolled in the academic preparatory department at Valparaiso University in Indiana grew significantly during the Civil War. While the liberal arts college and theology school at Bucknell University in 1863 closed temporarily, the academic preparatory school significantly increased its enrollment, thereby saving the school economically according to school documents. Southern colleges followed the same pattern of Northern institutions through extended academic preparatory departments and the admission of students formerly denied admission. The University of Alabama in 1861 created an academic preparatory department for boys 12 years or older. In 1863, the University of Georgia created University High School and suspended rules against admission of boys less than 14 to the University. The Faculty Senate of South Carolina College in 1862 voted to admit young students to replace revenue lost by the men who joined the Confederate Army (Rudy, 1996, pp. 69-70, 91).

Phase two of developmental education was dominated by the move from individual tutoring to the development of academic preparatory academies that helped to strengthen students' academic knowledge and skills before entry to the college curriculum. While such precollegiate academic preparatory academies were popular,

the professional literature does not contain empirical research studies that document their effectiveness for graduation rates of these academically underprepared students. It does appear that the academies were effective in preparing students for initial admission to the institution. While common logic supports the essential need, educators were either unable or unknowledgeable on how to evaluate their effectiveness regarding improving academic performance of students.

### Phase Three: Introduction of Remedial Classes to the College Curriculum, 1860s to 1940s

A common theme of this period is the direct involvement of the federal government with postsecondary education. Significant events during this period are the First Morrill Act, the Second Morrill Act, financial support for what would become Historic Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), and the growth of junior/community colleges. This era would see a tremendous growth in the number of students entering postsecondary education. In 1869, a mere 63,000 students (one percent of all 18 to 24 year-olds in America) were enrolled in 563 postsecondary institutions, an average of only 112 per institution. By 1900, the average number of students enrolled in a typical college had more than doubled to 243 within 30 years. The growth in college enrollments was due to the corresponding rapid growth of the overall population in America (NCES, 1993, p. 64). However, the overall rate of college attendance was still quite low. Since only approximately two percent of 18 to 24 year-olds enrolled at a postsecondary institution, many significant barriers still existed: high tuition costs, unofficial segregation and discriminatory practices, gender and racial stereotyping, financial need to directly enter the work force, lack of parental encouragement and support to attend college, and a lack of role models who had attended or completed a postsecondary degree..

#### Impact of Federal Legislation

While the doors of the colleges were opened much wider due to the 1862 Morrill Act, the academic preparation level of the potential students was uneven. Many of these new college students did not attend public high school since few were in operation, especially as one moved from the east coast to the expanding west. This dramatic widening of access to postsecondary education accelerated the development of academic bridge programs such as college academic preparatory departments. As described earlier, these academic preparatory academies were essential to provide practical hope for success of the newly admitted students from academically underprepared backgrounds. For example, “. . . Iowa State College required that entering freshman be fourteen years old and able to read, write, and do arithmetic. If they lacked these skills, they were placed in the college’s preparatory department” (Maxwell, 1997, p. 11).

The need for academic preparatory departments was so great due to the underprepared nature of students that 84 percent of the land grant institutions provided some form of remedial education by 1889 (Craig, 1997). With the sudden emergence of these new land grant institutions with more open admission policies, competition became fierce to attract students who could help pay the institutional operational costs

and faculty salaries. Since public high schools were not widespread across America, many new public and private colleges admitted students with only an elementary school education (Ross, 1942, pp. 113-115). There was a considerable struggle with the already established denominational colleges for the limited number of students who showed some interest in postsecondary education. Though the public institutions were established through funds provided by the First Morrill Act, the ongoing operating costs needed to be funded through taxes on the population and through student fees. Such taxes were unpopular among many in the New West since they had few financial resources themselves.

### Rise of New Postsecondary Institutions

The American Missionary Society established several colleges to educate the newly freed slaves (Brubacher & Rudy 1976, pp. 74-76). Considering the twin deficits of nearly nonexistent secondary education and the negative emotional impact of slavery upon most African-Americans in America, the accomplishments by the Historic Black Colleges and Universities are remarkable. Remedial education was an important and valued core element of these institutions as they became the primary producers of educated minority college graduates (Boylan & White, 1987). To this day, they continue to be the location of choice for students of color to successfully complete professional and graduate school degrees.

Junior colleges (later to be called community colleges) were established as an important extension of the new secondary school movement developing in the U.S. during the turn of the twentieth century. While the first free standing community college was the Joliet Junior College in 1902 (Henderson, 1960, p. 13), President Harper of the University of Chicago in 1892 created the idea of the junior college within the University of Chicago (Griffith, 1976). The traditional four-year undergraduate program was divided in half, the first two years were the "Academic College" and the final two years were designated as "University College." These two names would eventually change to "Junior College" and "Senior College" (Eells, 1931).

Among the broad mission of many community colleges was a college academic preparatory program. This focus on serving academically underprepared students led Vaughan (1983, p. 9) to describe them as "the Ellis Island of higher education." Many four-year institutions were eager to transfer their academic preparatory programs to community colleges in geographic proximity to them in the early half of the twentieth century. As described earlier, the use of standardized college admissions tests made it easier for colleges to sort students based on test scores to different types of institutions who maintained varying levels of admission selectivity. As four-year institutions began to receive more state and federal appropriations, there was a lessening need to admit the high numbers of academically underprepared students needed to help pay tuition to meet institutional expenses (Richardson, Martens, & Fisk, 1981). Some notable exceptions of four-year institutions transferring preparatory programs out were the University of Buffalo and the University of Minnesota. Both institutions were required by state legislatures to accept all high school graduates with an official graduation diploma (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 1983; Maxwell, 1979). However, college academic preparatory programs dropped in number at four-year institutions as a direct result of less academically prepared students enrolling in the

new junior colleges that excelled in providing a more comprehensive suite of academic support activities and remedial courses. A concurrent reason for enrollment at community colleges was that the lower tuition costs were more attractive to the developmental education students who often came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Federal financial aid and scholarship programs were not in existence at this time.

While the number of postsecondary institutions was rapidly increasing in the early 1900s, so were the methods for segregating students due to their scores on standardized college entrance examinations, gender, and ethnicity. The College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) was founded in 1890. An important tool for sorting potential college students was created by the CEEB called the College Entrance Examination which permitted colleges to use standardized test scores as criteria for entrance decisions to postsecondary institutions. Some believed that the introduction of scientific instruments would help ensure that meritocracy would win over heritage, economic, and political influence when making college entrance decisions:

It was believed that the school would be more objective about selecting people for their economic and social places through the use of scientific instruments for selection. Therefore, the science of education, particularly measurement, was considered the key to the efficient use of human resources. (Spring, 1986, p. 217)

Another goal of the CEEB was to standardize entrance criteria for postsecondary institutions nationwide as well as set exit criteria for high school students. It was hoped that secondary school administrators would use the examination as a diagnostic tool to increase the rigor of the high school curriculum and provide justification to college administrators to raise academic standards at the postsecondary institutions. These changes therefore might lead to the reduced need to provide remedial classes at the collegiate level (Boylan, 1988).

By 1879, 50 percent of the applicants to Harvard failed the institution's entrance examination and were then admitted "on condition." Tutorial programs which were initially designed to help students pass the college entrance test were now expanded to assist these provisionally admitted students to successfully complete their college courses (Weidner, 1990, p. 4). The Harvard Reports of 1892, 1895, and 1897 documented the poor academic preparation of incoming students. Part of the surprise to the university administrators was that the students who were suffering academic difficulty were not just those from poor or nonexistent high school education, but also the "picked boys" (Goodwin, 1895, p. 292), students who were from the upper class of American society (Hill, 1885). Academic rigor at Harvard exceeded the academic preparation level even of many students who had formal preparation for postsecondary education. This surprisingly placed many of these elite students into the developmental education category.

Curtis (1896), a Massachusetts superintendent, blamed the colleges for failing to have consistent college entrance requirements and testing procedures which would therefore set an exit standard for students from public secondary education. This pattern of blame shifting among parents, public school officials, and college administrators would persist as a reoccurring theme for the next hundred years in American education as each of the stake holders tried to explain the continuing

problem of student academic failure during college despite the best intentioned efforts by many to address successfully the issue.

#### Introduction of Remedial Classes to the College Curriculum

By 1874 Harvard established the first American college freshman remedial English course in response to faculty complaints that too many students lacked competency for formal writing activities. As described earlier, the introduction of remedial courses into the formerly fixed curriculum was possible due to permitting student choice of elective courses. Without that flexibility, remedial courses would have only been available as a precollegiate option. Academic conditions had not improved at Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Columbia by 1907 with still half the students failing to earn the minimum composite entrance exam score that now consisted of the College Entrance Examination. It appears that faculty expectation levels at these highly selective institutions continued to rise more quickly than the academic preparation levels of these students from affluent and privileged backgrounds. In response to this gulf between expectation by the faculty and the performance level of the incoming students, Harvard began to offer a remedial reading course at this time (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976, p. 244; Levine, 1996).

One stated goal of the CEEB was to eliminate the need for college preparatory programs since high schools were now expected to produce more academically prepared students. This goal, however, was unrealized. Much like today, many more students sought postsecondary education than those who enrolled in a college preparatory program during secondary school. Of those who enrolled in such a program of study, not all successfully mastered the academic course material though they might have received a high school diploma. Tutorial programs were supplemented with remedial classes during the first year of college to prepare students for the college-level curriculum. Yale, Princeton, and Columbia also added developmental courses to their curriculum for similar reasons (Wyatt, 1992).

While a variety of remedial courses were offered by individual institutions, the most common ones focused on remedial reading and study skills. More than 350 colleges in 1909 offered "How to Study" classes for academically underprepared students. The U.S. Commissioner for Education reported that in 1913 approximately 80 percent of postsecondary institutions offered college preparatory programs that offered a wide range of tutoring, remedial classes, and other forms of service (Maxwell, 1979), nearly the same percent as the middle of the 19th century. Unfortunately, there are few records that document research studies that analyzed these programs regarding their efficacy for improving student outcomes regarding higher grades and increased rates of college graduation.

Supporting the quickly growing field of remedial education classes, a hundred study skill books had been published by 1920 (Casazza & Silverman, 1996, p. 20). While most focused on secondary and postsecondary students, the first one that focused on college students exclusively was "Effective Study Procedures in Junior Colleges and Lower Division Courses" by Von Kleinsmid and Touton (1929).

Sensitive to perceptions by students, professors, and others, many colleges gradually began to redefine the manner in which they presented remedial activities. When Perry, Director of Harvard's Bureau of Study Counsel, changed the institution's "Remedial Reading" course to "The Reading Class," enrollment significantly increased

from 30 to 400 annually in 1938 (Wyatt, 1992). The content of this course had been adjusted to focus more on study strategies and less on the mechanical elements of reading. Perry's research suggested that high competency with isolated reading skills such as controlled eye movements and vocabulary word recognition did not always correlate with the ability to comprehend long reading assignments (Perry, 1959, p. 199). To control the number of students who wished to enroll in the course, Perry developed a placement test. While the students could do well with multiple choice questions, Perry reported that an astonishing 99 percent of the entering freshmen students were unable to write a short sentence that summarized content from a history chapter. In 1985 Harvard would move to mandatory enrollment in a remedial writing course based on the college placement assessment scores. After initial rejection of the course by many students, administrators followed the historical lesson from the reading course of a half century before by renaming it to something more acceptable by the potential consumer. Student enrollment increased dramatically when the name of the course was changed from "Basic Writing" to "Introduction to Expository Writing" (Armstrong, 1988). This strategy of course renaming is now becoming more popular and some institutions are attempting to cloak their remedial education classes by giving them names that will not draw attention of external reviewers or public officials who concurrently expect high college graduation rates without the use of remedial education classes by students who indicate a need for such enrollment. A few institutions have gone as far as renumbering the remedial classes to higher numbers to disguise their identity by mixing them in with other traditional first year college courses that count toward fulfilling general education graduation degree requirements.

To further document the growing trend of remedial classes, a national survey in 1929 revealed that about one-fourth of survey respondents stated that their institution provided some sort of reading admission examination and nearly an equal percent said that remedial courses were provided for students to remediate their deficiency. Most remedial courses were focused heavily on developing reading skills. Nearly 90 percent of respondents stated that they had not conducted research studies regarding the effectiveness of their programs (Parr, 1930).

While some institutions focused on enrolling newly admitted college students in remedial courses, other institutions required students to participate in precollegiate activities just before the beginning of classes. These summer academic bridge programs would become popular as a short-term remedy for admission of academically underprepared students.

Remedial reading classes at this time were the most common prescription for students with indicators of academic risk. Ohio State University was typical of universities implementing such a program of remedial classes. Students who scored on standardized college entrance examinations in the bottom quartile of the entering freshman class were required to attend a weekly reading course. The seven-week course focused on the mechanics of reading (i.e., eye movement, vocalization, phrase reading using a tachistoscope). Participating students earned a semester grade point average that was one-quarter of a grade higher than nonparticipants (Pressey & Pressey, 1930). Tomlinson (1989, p. 3) characterized the 1930s as an era for great improvement regarding diagnosis of reading deficiencies and the development of college reading clinics. Use of the tachistoscope was viewed as a significant tool for

the improvement of reading skills, therefore hopefully leading to improved comprehension gains with textbook readings and assigned text materials from the classroom. Education theorists assumed that improvement in the physical process of reading would lead to significant gains of comprehension (Robinson, 1933).

Book (1927a) reported on the effectiveness of “learning to study” classes offered at Indiana University. These courses were primarily focused on improving basic reading skills. The researcher postulated that 90 percent of knowledge learned during college was obtained through books and reading technical articles. Low scores on college entrance tests placed students into the learning skills course. Research studies suggested improvement with time management and reading skill (Book, 1927b). Book emphasized the importance of using course textbook and lecture material as the object for study skills that were taught and practiced. This immediate application of study and reading skills with classroom material would not become common until after the 1960s. Charters (1941) conducted a national survey that found while reading courses were offered at most institutions, they still focused on attempts to improve the mechanical aspects of reading (controlled eye movement, increased eye span, increased reading rate) and on isolated study skill instruction (Charters, 1941). Metacognitive learning strategies would not be widely taught in study skill courses until the 1980s and later.

Many Historic Black Colleges and Universities of the South provided a wide range of precollegiate academic development activities to help compensate for the lack of quality secondary education beginning in the late 1800s and early 1900s. While most of these institutions were established through private funds, some received direct financial support such as Howard University in the District of Columbia. Howard would become the premier HBCU in the nation (Prieto, 1997). The Southern Teaching Program, Inc., in the early 1900s involved students from the Yale Law School who worked with students at thirteen Black colleges during the summertime. These colleges started the same suite of academic enrichment programs that would become popular at predominately white colleges in the 1960s: special courses, intensified sections of regular college courses, tutoring, clinical work, and a reduced academic load (McGrath, 1965).

Within many institutions separate schools were created for students interested in academic majors centered on science, agriculture, and engineering to separate them from the liberal arts students whom some perceived to be of higher status. Even some of the elite institutions such as Harvard University created separate degrees and certificates for the less prepared students (Eliot, 1969). The creation of these separate academic units within the institution provided a home for the growing collection of remedial classes that they commonly offered in reading, English, mathematics, and study skills. The residual effects of this administrative decision can be seen today by observing the number of institutions that maintain separate academic units for teaching remedial and developmental courses. This has sometimes led to the marginalization of developmental educators who were viewed as ancillary to the academic mainstream of the institution.

While some strides were made in increasing access to postsecondary education for Caucasian males, the situation for students of color and women was only marginally improving. The policy of ‘separate but equal’ was the predominate policy for college education in the South for Blacks. While many HBCU institutions such as Tuskegee

and Howard were founded at this time, there was little significant access for students of color at predominately White institutions in the South. These residual effects of poor academic preparation, few role models of successful students at the high school or college level, historic racism as well as a lack of financial assistance effectively sealed shut the door of most predominately Caucasian institutions to a more diverse study body. On the other hand, some well-intentioned White advocates for Black students in northern institutions tried to enroll them in a rigorous liberal arts curriculum without adequate academic preparation. This was similar to the experience of some Native Americans students in the period following the American Revolutionary War. The results were nearly as disastrous with poor academic performance and few college graduates (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976). While tutoring programs were provided for White students to enable them to pass the college entrance exams and the rigorous courses experienced during the first year of college, such services were not generally extended to the new student subpopulations that sought admission to the institutions. Discriminatory practices -- both formal and informal -- would commonly deny service to females and students of color until the 1960s. It would take nearly another one hundred years before educational leaders would learn that academic access to college must be combined with a comprehensive approach of providing appropriate services for academically and economically disadvantaged students. The Civil Rights legislation of the 1960s would create federally-financed programs to bundle academic access, financial aid, and academic development.

Cultural stereotypes and gender discrimination limited most females to seeking postsecondary education from single gender women's colleges. These colleges first began to appear in the 1830s. It was feared by some elitists that the college experience would raise women above the duties of her "station" in life, at least the one that the traditional male-dominated aristocracy often prescribed. Proponents of this position believed that a man would not love a learned wife and it would be better to teach women to be:

Correct in their manners, respectable in their families, and agreeable in society . . . They were such delicate creatures, so different in mental as well as physical make-up from men, that they would never be able to survive the prolonged intellectual effort. (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976, p. 65)

Due to limited opportunities for attendance at secondary schools and the inferior level of many single gender college preparatory schools for females, many women's colleges were forced to focus their curriculum at a much lower level than postsecondary institutions with predominate male populations. A few women's colleges succeeded in delivering high quality college education: Vassar, Wellesley, Smith, and Bryn Mawr. But even these institutions, much like Harvard at its inception, found a compelling need to provide a college academic preparatory program due to the woeful condition of secondary education programs (Boylan & White, 1987). While women were allowed to earn academic degrees, these institutions had an underlying motivation to have these female students frequently serve in other menial capacities such as working in the laundry and provide cleaning services for the male students at nearby male or coed colleges (Maxwell, 1997, p. 11).

Summer sessions devoted to remedial courses became commonly offered on many college campuses to help reduce the time taken to complete college degrees (Van, 1992). This was the next logical step building upon the practice of offering short workshops preceding the beginning of college courses in the Fall. It was critical during the World War II for colleges to quickly produce college graduates to serve as officers. One of the most popular reading techniques, SQ3R, was developed by Frank Robinson from Ohio State University to help military personnel study their textbooks more quickly and effectively during the condensed, eight-week college courses offered during the summer semesters. After the war, SQ3R would enjoy near unanimous use by study skill and reading classes for the following generation (Maxwell, 1997, p. 13).

As this phase of developmental education came to a close, World War II had an unanticipated impact upon developmental education. The need to produce college graduates who could immediately provide leadership as officers encouraged institutions to increase their speed and effectiveness in producing college graduates with highly effective learning and critical thinking abilities needed.

This third phase of developmental education was marked by the rapid expansion of a heterogeneous student body that required intensive academic development programs. Precollegiate academic preparatory academies were insufficient to meet the needs presented by this expanded student body. It was necessary to introduce remedial courses into the college curriculum to attempt a redress of their inadequate academic skills and knowledge.

### Early Developmental Education History: Prologue for the Future

The historical record is clear that developmental education and learning assistance programs have been integral and widespread to American higher education since its inception. Since the expectation levels continue to rise both regarding admissions preparation and graduation skill, the need for developmental education and learning assistance programs at all levels of postsecondary education will increase. However, the form of such services may change to meet the political and practical needs of the institution and the student.

Rather than continuing its earlier tradition of commonly existing at the peripheral outskirts of the academy, developmental education will become more “mainstreamed.” Many stand-alone study skill classes are often becoming linked courses, paired with a first-year general education course such as English Composition, History I, or Introduction to Sociology. The instructors of the paired courses intentionally integrate the course material between the two courses so that the students immediately practice use of study strategies with academic content material. Another version of this integration is practiced by the General College of the University of Minnesota where first-year general education courses are infused with the study strategy instruction. The same strategy is used in Video-based Supplemental Instruction (VSI) courses developed by the University of Missouri-Kansas City. An earlier variation of the integration of study strategies mastery development is Supplemental Instruction, a widely-used adjunct instructional program used to improve student academic performance in historically-difficult courses ([www.umkc.edu/cad/si/](http://www.umkc.edu/cad/si/)).

Some educational leaders proclaim a new emphasis is taking root in higher education (Lazerson, Wagener, & Shumanis, 2000). They expose the time-honored myth that teaching and learning are two sides of the same coin. This new change in emphasis of the education model is reflected in several areas. The first area concerns the central focus of education. Rather than the traditional teacher-centered model, the focus according to these proponents is a shift to being learning-centered. Instead of the focusing on the broadcaster of information, it is now focused on the effectiveness of the transmission process. The traditional instructional model encourages an increase in the quantity of information that is presented to students and use of new instructional technologies to transmit it. After a long period of committing scarce resources to improving teaching, many educators are turning their attention to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the learning environment. Rather than examining how much information was delivered, the question is how much does the student understand. As the focus of education shifts from the professor to the learner, many developmental educators are reinventing themselves as resources for the entire campus -- students and faculty alike -- in partnering with the new enriched learning environment.

Numerous developmental education centers have been transformed into full service learning and teaching centers. Rather than focusing exclusively with developmental students, these departments have changed their mission. This “value-added” mission expands service for all students, not just those at the institution’s margins who have traditionally received additional help -- the developmental and the gifted students. In addition, some of these expanded centers also provide faculty development services as well. Some of the common practices of these expanded centers include using academic support programs to provide requested feedback to course professors, publishing teaching effectiveness newsletters, conducting learning effectiveness workshops, providing teaching mentors, and consulting on instructional delivery innovation.

Astin (1998, p. 11) stated that the excellence of a higher education institution is often defined primarily by resources and reputation. One major resource is the enrollment of students who have the highest high school cumulative grade point averages, the highest test scores on standardized college entrance examinations, and the strongest recommendations from prominent people. Astin states:

It goes without saying that the underprepared student is a kind of pariah in American higher education, and some of the reasons are obvious: since most of us believe that the excellence of our departments and of our institutions depends on enrolling the very best-prepared students that we can, to admit underprepared students would pose a real threat to our excellence. These educators value being smart much more than . . . developing smartness. (Astin 1998, p. 12)

The challenge for developmental educators is to reinvent themselves as part of the new wave of “talent developers” on their campus. When policy makers begin to see the role for a mainstreamed developmental education program for developing the talent of all students, then postsecondary education will take another major step in achieving higher levels of success for the broader access.

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