

Ricky Tompkins on MMA at NorthWest Arkansas Community College

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What we had was multiple levels of developmental, both in math, in reading, and in writing. And the fact of the matter is, students weren't progressing through, through any of those. We did a study after I first got to NWACC, really looking at how are students progressing through. And what we found is that if you tested into developmental, any level, in all three, reading, writing, and math, you had less than a 2% chance of getting any type of credential from us whatsoever—2%. And so we knew we had to make changes.

So really, from the perspective of NWACC, we had to look at a way to where we could get students in credit-bearing classes faster. Because we dug through the data and we saw that the sooner students got into those credit-bearing classes, the more likely they were to persist and to continue. And so we were looking at ways to be able to do that. One of those ways we were looking at was through placement. We were also able to participate in some Complete College America programming, Strong Start to Finish. And it really did begin to change the thought process of the faculty. Because many of the faculty, including myself, we grew up in: Okay, if you don't make a 19 on the ACT—which was the only way you were going to be assessed—then you went to developmental. That's the way we were brought up. That's what we knew.

The group that really embraced this and moved it forward, beginning at NWACC, were the English faculty within Communication and Art. This was something that faculty saw in their classrooms. They had high-achieving students that could do the work, but because of placement issues, they were sitting in a developmental class and that with a little bit of confidence, with a little bit of boot camp work, which we did as well to be able to prepare them for those assessments, they would flourish when they got into those credit-bearing classes.

One story comes to mind about, actually, I'll be honest with you, it was a group of students, while I was at NWACC, who graduated from high school. Because of a multiple measures placement, they were able to go into a path to where they got language support but at the same time were coreqly connected to, with that same instructor, Comp 1. They graduated, and all of them have moved back to Northwest Arkansas and are employed here with many of the industries that we have and are highly successful. And the reason why they did that is because they had some, I'll just say it, they had some successes early on by being connected to the right classes, with the right instructor, because of multiple measures.

And so, what we're seeing is, we're seeing institutions change their placement policies to be able to do some of these things. Institutions are looking at data differently and using different data. All of our institutions have access to a system called Triand, which is where high school information for high school graduates, all of it is there, whether that's transcripts, whether that's placement scores, whether that is progression through classes, even for our concurrent students. They're making changes to their placement plans to be able to utilize more resources to get students placed more effectively and into those credit-bearing classes. They've done a great job at the institutional level.