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# Student Experiences in Corequisite Courses at CUNY

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A significant body of research shows that corequisite courses are more effective at supporting student success in gateway English and math courses than prerequisite developmental courses (Logue et al., 2019; Mejia et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2021; Park-Gaghan et al., 2021). As the field increasingly shifts to adopt and expand corequisites, questions remain about how to design and structure corequisites to best support student success. In the fall of 2019, the City University of New York (CUNY) set fall 2022 as the deadline for phasing out traditional prerequisite remediation and scaling corequisite remediation. CUNY's Office of Academic Affairs (OAA) provided guidance on corequisite reform, including a limit on contact hours and requirements for college credit awarded, but it did not impose a specific corequisite model; rather, its policy allowed colleges to determine how best to offer corequisite courses on their campuses. Therefore, CUNY colleges' corequisite models varied, providing a rich context to explore how different corequisite course features influence students' experiences.

At the start of 2023, CCRC began a partnership with CUNY on a study to explore the first year of full-scale implementation of corequisite courses in the CUNY system. CUNY OAA, which had been more prescriptive about reforms in the past, wanted to know how CUNY institutions were taking advantage of the flexibility of the corequisite reform to devise corequisite models that would best serve their students and their institutional context, as well as what lessons were emerging at the colleges. CUNY OAA hoped colleges would feel comfortable sharing their experiences with CCRC as an independent evaluator and that the resulting research study would elevate corequisite implementation and scaling practices that other institutions could learn from. By examining how different CUNY colleges structured their corequisite courses and managed the transition to fully scaled corequisite courses, this study aimed to grow the field's understanding of factors critical to the implementation and scaling of corequisite courses, including how students, faculty, and staff experienced the changes. The research was designed in two phases: The first phase focused

on the experiences and perceptions of faculty, administrators, and staff (Fay et al., 2024); the second phase focused on the experiences and perceptions of students in varied corequisite course contexts. This brief presents findings from the second phase.

We draw on data from focus groups with 57 students enrolled in corequisite English and math courses at three CUNY colleges to share student perspectives on various features of corequisite courses. We conducted semi-structured focus group discussions in academic year 2023-24. The students in our sample represent a wide range of demographic characteristics and programs of study. In this brief, we provide an overview of the corequisite models at the three CUNY colleges, and then we share three factors that improved students' experiences in corequisite courses and three factors that presented challenges for students. We also dive deeper into one college's adoption of the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) model. Finally, we share key takeaways and considerations for community colleges implementing corequisite courses.

## Corequisite Course Features

The fundamental idea behind corequisite courses is that students who are not yet proficient in English or math are placed in college-level courses with additional contact hours and support, as opposed to placement in remedial courses as a prerequisite to college-level coursetaking. Corequisite course models varied across the three colleges in our study and varied even between English and math courses within colleges. Table 1 shows some key ways in which corequisite models differed across the three colleges.

**TABLE 1. Key Differences in Corequisite Course Models**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Number of corequisite courses offered** | | |
| One corequisite course for all nonproficient students | OR | Multiple corequisite courses that serve lower- and higher-scoring nonproficient students or multiple corequisite courses that serve students in different program clusters |
| **Sorting of students in classes** | | |
| Nonproficient students co-enrolled with proficient students in the same college-level class (ALP model) | OR | Only nonproficient students in a class |
| **Distribution of additional contact hours** | | |
| Add contact time to existing college-level class | OR | Create an additional weekly class session to the college-level class |
| **Integration of remedial support** | | |
| Use just-in-time developmental support that supplements college-level content | OR | Front-load developmental support early in the semester before starting college-level content |

While the models varied across the three colleges, our research revealed factors that cut across models and influenced students' experiences in corequisite courses regardless of how the courses were structured. In the following sections, we highlight factors that appear to improve students' course experiences and those that present challenges for students.

# Three Factors That Improved Students' Experiences in Corequisite Courses

## 1. Embedded Tutors

Embedded tutors are students who have previously taken the course that they are supporting. All colleges in our sample included embedded tutors in their English and math corequisite courses as a strategy to provide extra support to students. The tutors are hired, trained, and paid by the writing center or tutoring center of the college, not by the department in which they tutor. Our research suggests that embedded tutors are central to student success, offering personalized, accessible, and more comfortable avenues for support than traditional classroom instruction.

The role and contribution of embedded tutors varied across the colleges in our sample. In some cases, the tutor attended class sessions and walked around during individual or small group work time to offer more personalized support to students. In other cases, the tutor facilitated a portion of class time. For instance, at one college, the embedded tutor was responsible for leading the second portion of an English corequisite class while the professor worked one-on-one with students on their essays. At another college, after the professor gave a lecture and gave guidance on assignments, the tutor was responsible for leading students through a set of practice problems for the final hour of a math corequisite class.

Students reported that the embedded tutors were a helpful presence in class because their status as fellow students made them approachable. As one student put it, "She's one of us." Another student said, "Because they're seniors, you can vibe more with them. They're gonna understand where you're coming from." Students also shared how tutors provide a different perspective or different kind of assistance than professors. For example, a student in a corequisite math class shared that the tutor taught students alternative ways to approach math problems, which were sometimes easier for students to understand than the approach the professor taught, depending on students' learning styles:

> *He makes himself available, and he'll try to explain it in different ways. So if the teacher teaches one way and he knows another way to make it easier, he was like, "Okay, this is the way the teacher taught you, and this is another way to do it. [You can do it] however you find it easier to do, as long as the answers are the same."*

Embedded tutors can be an approachable and relatable source of academic and personal support for students. They can also provide valuable assistance to faculty by helping to answer students' questions and working with students one-on-one. Because of these benefits, colleges should consider ways to sustain and expand their embedded tutoring programs.

## 2. A Supportive Instructor Who Meets Students Where They Are

Due to the structure of corequisite courses, students spend a couple more hours per week with their professors than they would in a typical college course. Therefore, professors play a pivotal role in fostering student success in corequisite courses. Students frequently said that their professor was what they liked best about their course.

Students repeatedly said that a professor's teaching style and attitude directly influenced their ability to not only understand course material but also develop a positive attitude toward a subject. Students appreciated when professors brought energy and enthusiasm to their teaching, which ignited student interest and engagement. Students also appreciated when their professors were encouraging and empowering, making them feel capable and confident. Professors like this could transform a previously disliked subject (such as math) into an engaging one for students. As one student said,

> *All my life I thought I was bad at math and couldn't do math. … When I had her class, I can always say that she made me feel like a genius. … I understood it somehow. … She also makes you go up to the board and try it out for yourself even though you're scared to go and do it because you think you're going to not do it well, but she helps you out … so you remember how to do it yourself.*

Furthermore, students appreciated when professors were proactive in offering support. For example, one student shared that their professor did not wait for the student to explicitly ask for help but rather identified the need and provided timely, personalized support: "He'll come to you. If you look confused, he walks over to you and says, 'Do you got it?' And then he'll help." Students also liked when their professors used real-world examples in class, which helped students connect concepts they were learning in class to practical applications outside of class. When topics connected to students' lives and current events, it made the material more engaging and fostered lively discussions. One student shared, "He brings the real world into the class with certain topics, … puts our viewpoints or our examples in it, and asks us how we personally feel about this and that."

Beyond supporting students' success in class, taking a genuine personal interest in students as human beings was also cited by students as a trait they appreciated in professors. Students liked when professors were consistently responsive and accessible, and when they proactively checked in on students about what was going on both inside and outside of school. These behaviors signaled to students that their professors acknowledged and valued their lives outside of class. One student said, "She makes us feel heard, so I really like that class. And we talk about everything, literally everything, [including] what's going on in the real world."

It goes without saying that professors are critical to students' experiences in a course. Given that students in corequisite classes spend extra time with their professors every week, it is important for faculty members teaching corequisite courses to empower their students, be enthusiastic about teaching, proactively support students, connect personally with students, and use engaging teaching practices. Colleges can support faculty by considering faculty-to-

student ratios in classes, being mindful of faculty members' workloads in course schedules and faculty contracts, and providing opportunities and resources for professional development.

## 3. Sense of Community With Classmates

Beyond strengthening faculty-student relationships, the increased contact hours in corequisite courses similarly created opportunities for enhanced relationship-building among students. It is important to note that many of the students we interviewed were in their first semester of college at the time, which meant that many of them were enrolled in other introductory courses together with classmates from their corequisite English or math class. Students often articulated the profound impact of shared learning experiences on their sense of academic comfort and motivation. One student said,

> *My favorite thing is … my classmates because, most of them, we share three classes together or two classes together. … I like community. If I'm alone, I will not do the class. I will say, "Oh, these people don't like me" and I don't want to do that class. But when I know them all and we are helping [each other], I just feel comfortable and want more to do the class.*

Additionally, students appreciated the sense of community formed among their classmates due not only to spending a lot of time together but also to sharing similar attitudes, motivation levels, and proficiency levels. Some students said that being in a class with motivated and engaged peers positively affected their own motivation to learn. One student shared this observation about students' participation encouraging other classmates to participate:

> *If one person asks a question, it encouraged the other person to ask a question. … It makes people feel more comfortable. … Even if it might sound silly, I just ask away. I think that can help others too to ask a question.*

Students we spoke with also highlighted that they appreciated feeling a sense of togetherness with their peers when it came to having similar academic backgrounds and challenges. One student shared that being in a class among peers of similar knowledge and skill levels boosted their comfort and confidence in class:

> *I feel comfortable reading out loud. I know no one's going to judge me or laugh. … We all might make one mistake or two as we're reading. … It just makes you feel comfortable with a group of people.*

Forming connections with peers early in college can be crucial for students' successful transition to college and their ongoing engagement and success throughout their college journey. Since corequisite courses meet for extended contact hours and since students enrolled in corequisite courses are likely to also be enrolled in other introductory courses with the same classmates, colleges should consider ways to foster supportive environments that encourage such students to connect with each other.

# Three Factors That Presented Challenges for Students in Corequisite Courses

## 1. Fast Pace of the Course

Because corequisite courses integrate college-level content and developmental content into one course, professors must move through a large quantity of content in a condensed amount of time. Additionally, because professors must teach students with varying knowledge and skill levels in one class, the professor may have fewer opportunities to attend to individual students who fall behind. These structural features made the pace of corequisite courses feel fast and challenging for many students we spoke with, particularly in math.

How students perceived the pacing of their corequisite course depended in part on the academic discipline—whether it was in English or math. Our research suggests that English faculty members often use the same reading materials, assignments, and learning outcomes to teach both corequisite and college-level English composition courses. Therefore, students enrolled in a corequisite English course get more time to cover the same amount of material as those in a college-level English composition course, and professors often use the additional contact hours to provide individualized, one-on-one support. However, because of the cumulative nature of math curriculum, math faculty who teach corequisite college algebra, for example, must use the additional instruction time to also cover pre-algebra content and skills. Therefore, students enrolled in a corequisite math course have more time but also must cover more material compared to a college-level math course.

Our data bore out these disciplinary course pace differences. Broadly, students said that their English class moved at an appropriate or even slow pace. Here are examples of how students described the pace of their English class:

> *We have time between assignments to submit and then review and make sure we understand, and then we go on to the next one.*

> *It has actually been at a good rate. I don't feel like it is too fast. I actually feel like it's more on the slower side than fast, actually. … I don't struggle in that class.*

In contrast, overall, students said that their math class moved too quickly through the content. One student said, "He moves too fast. … Either you catch on or you don't, … either you sink or swim." Below are other examples of how students described the pace of their math class:

> *It's too quick, too fast. Why are we learning three things in one day? There's no time for review, it's none of that. I can't retain knowledge, especially when we got other classes. We got so much other things that's going on.*

> *She goes over the topic and then she'll throw in some steps of how to do it, … she'll put up some problems for us to do and then—right there, right after that—we're onto the next one. That's just how it is. She'll ask us, though, do we have any problems? Sometimes we get stuck, sometimes we all get stuck; it is difficult. But then once we get picking up on it, she just got to go on to the next one.*

Students who felt that their math class moved too quickly also recognized and acknowledged that their instructors do not have all of the control over the pace of their course because of the large class size, amount of material they are required to cover, and/or because of the way that professors must fit in content around the breaks and exam periods scheduled by CUNY. One student explained, "He'll tell you himself, he's teaching a class of 30 students. … And just because a person, or … it could be five students, just because they're not getting it as fast, he still has to move on to finish his curriculum." Another student said, "I find that she's always saying, 'We got to catch up on work. Oh we're behind.' … I feel like she's under stress because she has to get the lessons out that she's supposed to get out, and it is crazy."

These disciplinary differences in how students experience the pace of their courses suggest that while the additional contact hours seem to be sufficient for students in corequisite English courses, the additional contact hours may be insufficient for students to manage the demands of corequisite math courses. Students in corequisite math classes may benefit from additional supports and resources, such as embedded tutors, other tutoring supports, and high-impact teaching practices (Melhuish et al., 2024; Pressimone Beckowski & Torsney, 2025).

## 2. Low Motivation and Engagement Among Classmates

As previously described, because corequisite courses have extended contact hours, students end up spending more time with their classmates than they would in a typical college course. Therefore, there is more opportunity for the behaviors and attitudes of peers to influence and become a significant part of students' experiences. Previously we discussed how students appreciated a sense of community among similarly motivated and engaged peers. Conversely, students also reported that peers with lower motivation or a negative attitude toward the course were not conducive to a supportive and productive learning environment.

Some students said that when peers disrupted class, it made them feel like their classmates were less motivated and less engaged, thereby decreasing their own sense of engagement and also decreasing the value and productivity of the course. One student said, "A handful [of students] in the class—I don't feel like they're taking this class as seriously as I am. It's like when the teacher's in the middle of instruction, there's interruption, there's joking." Another student, who is a parent, made a similar comment about the impact of disengaged students on her learning: "I am only speaking for myself, but I come here, I don't come here to make friends or to [joke around] here or anything like that. I come here because I have things to do. I'm a mom, I'm a business owner. I have things to do. So it is really frustrating when the lessons get disrupted." According to these students, it wasn't differences in peers' proficiency levels with course content and skills per se that challenged the learning process but rather differences in peers' perceived maturity, engagement, and motivation.

Students also spoke about low attendance in corequisite courses as a factor that discouraged and frustrated them, because it suggested low commitment and motivation among their peers. For example, students reported that in a class of about 30 students, typically only 10–14 students attend class sessions, and attendance can get as low as 6 students. In both our study and previous research on corequisite courses (Cerna et al., 2023; Martirosyan et al., 2025), low attendance has been noted as a prevalent and persistent challenge, and multiple faculty members and administrators also highlighted attendance challenges in the first phase of our study (Fay et

al., 2024). Students' experiences elevate the importance of encouraging consistent attendance and engaging students in meaningful participation.

## 3. Under-Resourced Advising and Inconsistent Understanding About Placement

As mentioned previously, corequisite courses can have longer contact hours or accompanying support classes, so these courses can look different from other courses that students are accustomed to taking. Students often seek explanations from their advisors for why they've been placed into a longer math or English course, or why they are enrolled in two English courses instead of one.

Many students described their experience in advising sessions as passive and impersonal, where decisions about their course placements were primarily made by advisors with little to no explanation about what the corequisite course was and why they were placed into it. Some students said they were simply given a schedule of classes without ever personally interacting with an advisor: "[My advisor] emailed me all the classes I need to take for when I'm building my schedule." Many students said they felt overlooked or disconnected from the advising process.

Students who did receive information from their advisors heard varying levels of detail about their corequisite courses. Generally, students understood that they were enrolled in a foundational or lower level course, but students generally were not given a clear definition of the term "corequisite." As a consequence, students often built upon the limited information they received from advisors and made sense of their placement in their own ways. Some students received helpful information from their advisors that explained the additional class hours as akin to "a lab component" or as a "refresher" or "extra support" that would help them build confidence and prepare them to engage with college-level material. Some students understood that they were placed into a corequisite English or math course because of their high school test scores or because too much time had elapsed between high school and college. However, other students received information from advisors that might decrease their confidence or motivation. One student described her class as "slow English." The student said, "I remember [my advisor] telling me it's like, I don't want to say a 'slow English,' but this one is going to help me out more. That's why it's like two extra hours." It was unclear to us whether the advisor in this scenario meant that the corequisite English course would move at a slower pace than the college-level English course. However, regardless of how the advisor intended the "slow" descriptor, it framed the course in a negative light for the student.

Students enrolled in Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) model corequisite courses often wanted more explanation because of the unusual structure of those courses. The ALP model pairs a college-level course with a support course, which appear on students' schedules and transcripts as two separate courses. Yet not all students in the college-level course are required to stay for the support course, potentially causing confusion among the students who are supposed to stay for the support section. Several students reported feeling confused about the purpose and requirements of the support course and why they were required to attend while other classmates were not. Students said they only received this information from their professor once classes started. One student enrolled in an ALP model corequisite course said, "It wasn't until we got into the class and I heard about the lab." Another student shared, "So then on the first day of school …, the professor, he explained what the class is in depth and told us step by step how it's going to go." (See the box on the next page for how faculty at one college described the ALP courses to students and how students reacted.)

## AVOIDING STIGMA IN ALP MODEL COREQUISITE COURSES

The Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) model is a popular model for corequisite course implementation at many colleges across the country (Fay et al., 2024). The ALP model, developed at the Community College of Baltimore County in 2007, enrolls students who have low proficiency scores in a college-level course alongside proficient-scoring students. After the class and a brief break, only the low-proficiency students return for the support class, which takes place for an additional hour with the professor. Under this model, the possibility of stigmatizing the low-proficiency students who stay for the support class has been a longstanding and common concern. One college in our sample implemented the ALP model for the English corequisite courses intended for students with the greatest remedial need. We highlight faculty and student voices from this college to share how faculty at this college have fought to avoid stigmatizing students, and how students at this college experienced the support class.

Faculty members who teach the ALP model corequisite English courses said they were thoughtful and intentional about how they explained the dual-course structure and purpose to students, taking care not to use deficit-based language. One faculty member said, "I always nickname it the afterparty and try to create some camaraderie or something positive about it and make it sound like fun." Another faculty member explained,

> *I do think we have to do some salesmanship work because we're asking them to stay for extra time. … I don't want there to be any stigma or sense of, "Oh, you need extra help." I tried to put a good spin on it and emphasized that it's an additional support resource, and my students in the fall who did it had really great outcomes. It gave them an advantage; they got a step ahead of everybody else. … I try to emphasize all the benefits to create buy-in.*

Notably, students in these corequisite English courses at this college echoed what faculty members said about the ALP course structure, purpose, and benefits. The students with low proficiency scores did perceive that they were being distinguished from their higher scoring peers because they were required to stay for the support course while some of their peers were not. However, the students highlighted the similarities between themselves and their higher scoring peers rather than their differences:

> *Technically we have the same class, it's just that some people stay later. … All of us, we have the same similar connection, we all struggle in the same type of way. … Some people, even if they're not even in [the support course], they could still come to [it] because in a way that's still more help. That's more time, more stability. … We all go through the same exact thing. We all live in the same exact community. We're all surrounded by the same exact thing. So we're all going to struggle with all that we struggle with.*

Students also said that they thought they were having a more productive learning experience than their peers because of the support section:

> *I feel like we're in [the support section] only because we need more help. But being in [the support section] makes the help we get better than, no offense, but better than the help [a student in English Composition I] gets. Because we're already on top because of the things that we do in [English Composition I] and then we go and do [assignments in the support section].*

> *If I only had [English Composition I] and I didn't have [the support section], I feel like my writing would still be at the same level that it was as when I came into college—and my writing was terrible. And then when I got to [the support section], that really brought more of my writing out and [made me more] focused.*

From the experiences of faculty and students at this college, it appears that when the ALP course structure is explained clearly and the purpose and benefits of the course are framed from an asset-based perspective rather than a deficit-based one, students in the support class do not feel stigmatized as lesser than their high-scoring peers. It is important for colleges implementing the ALP model to provide faculty and advisors with training and resources to describe the course to students in a clear, motivating, and empowering way.

Advising at community colleges is often understaffed and under-resourced, leading to high caseloads that result in brief, infrequent, and/or impersonal interactions between students and advisors. Therefore, faculty members often provide a significant amount of informal advising to students. Students' experiences with advising—especially regarding their corequisite course placement, its purpose, and its requirements—highlight the need for more supports for advising across colleges, as well as for more training and resources for both advisors and faculty members to describe and explain course purpose, structure, placement, and requirements in a clear way that builds students' confidence and motivation.

## Discussion and Recommendations

From speaking with students who are enrolled in corequisite English and math courses, we learned that embedded tutors, supportive professors, and a sense of community with peers improved students' experiences in corequisite courses. These factors were present across corequisite course model types, academic disciplines, and colleges, demonstrating that regardless of institutional context, subject matter, and corequisite course structure, colleges should consider ways to bolster these features. We also learned that fast course pacing, unclear or impersonal advising, and being around less-motivated peers were challenges for students, discouraging students academically and socially. Four key lessons emerge from this research:

1. **Embedded tutoring, when structured well and supported sufficiently, is an important resource for students in corequisite courses.** However, faculty members are not always sufficiently trained or prepared to work with tutors in their class. Also, faculty members cited the lack of consistent funding for embedded tutoring programs as a leading cause for high turnover among tutors, which further leads to inefficient use of the tutors as a resource. Colleges and college systems should expand and invest in embedded tutoring programs. Colleges should provide training to faculty members to promote meaningful and productive engagement with tutors; training should also be provided to tutors to promote meaningful and productive engagement with students.
2. **Additional support and resources can help students manage the pace of a corequisite math course.** Math faculty members have the daunting task of teaching students college-level math material while also catching them up on the foundational math content and skills that are necessary to learn the college-level material—all in a limited amount of time. This leads many students to experience corequisite math courses as moving too quickly with not enough time for them to practice the skills sufficiently and fully grasp the content. Supports like embedded tutoring and high-impact teaching practices, in particular, may improve the experiences of students in corequisite math classes. Colleges should sustain and expand embedded tutoring programs in math classes, as well as provide faculty members with the flexibility and training to employ embedded tutors in the way that best serves their students' needs. Colleges should also provide robust opportunities and resources for professional development for math faculty members so they can stay up-to-date on high-impact teaching practices in math courses.

3. **Students want to understand why they have been placed into certain courses and how and why corequisite courses are structured differently than other college courses.** While students often intend to have placement conversations with advisors, due to the understaffing and high caseloads of advising, students sometimes turn to faculty members for explanations. Colleges should equip both advisors and faculty members with student-centered and asset-based language to explain corequisite course options and placement policies to students in order to improve students' understanding, boost students' motivation, and build students' sense of belonging and confidence. Colleges can also improve course descriptions for corequisite courses on college websites and in course catalogs to help students understand their placement and the purpose and structure of their corequisite courses.
4. **Students want to be in motivating and engaging learning environments, and they seek personal relationships with their professors and camaraderie among their classmates.** It is important for colleges to seek ways to support students' relationship-building and engagement. Faculty members should have access to professional learning resources focused on how they can build personal connections with their students. Faculty members should also have access to professional learning opportunities and resources to implement teaching practices and class activities/assignments that help students build interpersonal bonds with each other to foster a sense of community. Colleges can also encourage more connection-building among students by scheduling courses in cohorts or learning communities, or by expanding student clubs and extracurricular events.

As long as corequisite reform has existed, this question has lingered in the field: Which model is the best model of corequisite remediation? Corequisite models have demonstrated better student outcomes than traditional remediation, but there is still plenty of room for improvement in student success in gateway English and math courses (Kane et al., 2021; Ran & Lin, 2022). Corequisite course models continue to proliferate as colleges figure out and implement what they have the resources to implement, and it can be challenging to document and compare distinct models because models vary greatly. Our research highlights features that exist across corequisite models that can benefit or hinder students. By considering these cross-cutting features, the implementation of corequisite courses under a variety of models can be improved.

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