

From Remediation to Graduation: Alcorn State University's Summer Developmental Program

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This article describes one university's efforts to attract suitable high school students. Alcorn's College for Excellence Summer Developmental Program provides academic instruction and tutoring to select high school students to prepare them for collegiate success.

Boatman (2011) declared the lack of academic preparation as a significant barrier to college success. As a result, approximately 40% of first-year students were enrolled in four-year college remediation programs, and 55–65% of first-year students began community college remediation programs. More than two million students had enrolled in developmental courses in the United States between 2005 and 2008 (Boylan, 2009). These staggering numbers of students became the foundation of a \$2.8 billion deficit resulting in direct college costs or lost earning potential because of college dropouts. Collins (2010) maintained that the increasing cost of remedial education actually lowers students' chances of successfully earning a degree. In fact, approximately 57% of college students dropped out before the start of the second year (Reason, 2009). For these reasons, Alcorn State University's College for Excellence has placed strategic focus on attracting and assisting students to maintain a high retention rate (O. Oredein, personal communication, June 9, 2011).

The Student Candidacy Process

According to Dr. Olayinka Oredein, Associate Dean of the College for Excellence and Director of Summer Developmental Program, the SDP is a program funded by the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) to give struggling students an opportunity to attend school beyond their high school years (personal communication, June 9, 2011). IHL saw the need to help bridge the educational gap that exists between affluent students and those with meager means. IHL sponsors the Summer Developmental Program at all state-funded universities, including Alcorn State University, Delta State University, Jackson State University,

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Mississippi State University, Mississippi University for Women, Mississippi Valley State University, the University of Mississippi, and the University of Southern Mississippi. Each university receives a stipend to offset expenses and to provide compensation for staff members who are selected by their respective university to oversee the program and to deliver instruction.

Each year, the staff members of Alcorn's College for Excellence initiates their search for suitable candidates for the Summer Developmental Program (SDP) in January by visiting schools in nearby Hinds, Claiborne, Jefferson, Wilkinson, Amite, and Warren counties to introduce students to the possibility of attending college without passing the American College Testing (ACT) exam. Staff members provide prospective students with applications, then review the applications to determine promising candidates. The best candidates are younger than 21, have no children, have earned at least a 2.5 cumulative high school grade point average (GPA), and have successfully passed all components of the Mississippi Subject Area Testing Program (SATP) exams.

Next, the staff of the College for Excellence conducts face-to-face interviews with all potential candidates to ascertain the applicants' level of interest in the nine-week Summer Developmental Program. In addition to their interest levels, students' aptitudes are measured by allowing them to complete a pre-test using the Accuplacer exam. The Accuplacer measures students' academic ability in reading, mathematical analysis, and English. After compiling the results, approximately 90 students are chosen to participate in the rigorous SDP at Alcorn State University.

Student-Faculty Ratio

Oredein asserted that the student-faculty ratio for the Summer Developmental Program is generally no more than 15:1, which provides a small setting in which students expand academically and culturally. Not only are teachers able to provide intensive instructional support to students on a daily basis, but the students are also afforded an opportunity to live on campus and experience the university's culture prior to becoming freshmen. As a result, students feel more inclined to ask questions of their instructors and their peers in the more relaxed atmosphere.

Program Schedule

Oredein stated that because students are only allotted nine weeks to transition into university life, they maintain a busy academic schedule from Monday through Friday. Each day begins at 7:00 a.m. with breakfast and transition to the first class—reading, English, or math—for 50 instructional minutes per course. Two days per week, students participate in a university life course to help them become acclimated to living on the university campus. Computer-based online laboratory coursework is also a part of the students' schedules with all students being required to spend 50 minutes in the laboratory, two days per week with instructor assistance. Students are also required to participate in online laboratory assignments for four hours per week with an evening laboratory assistant.

After participating in the program for nine weeks, students are tested again using the Accuplacer exam and the IHL Common Entrance Examination to measure their growth. If the students successfully pass the Accuplacer exam with at least 80% accuracy, they are granted the opportunity to attend Alcorn or any other state-funded university in the fall as a full-time freshman and enroll in entry-level freshman courses. However, those students who are not successful with the Accuplacer exam post-test are enrolled in additional developmental courses to help them grasp the foundational concepts in which they show a deficit. If students fail the Common Entrance Examination, they cannot be admitted to a state-funded university.

Program Goals

Oredein maintained the Alcorn State University SDP has three primary goals. The first goal is to assist entering Summer Developmental students in becoming full-time Alcorn State University students upon their successful completion of the nine-week Summer Developmental Program. The program provides students with focused classroom instruction, computer-assisted instruction, and individualized tutorials in the following courses: EN-098 (Developmental English), MA-098 (Developmental Mathematics), RE-098 (Developmental Reading), and LA-098 (Support/Lab Seminar). Students also receive opportunities for cultural expansion by participating in teacher-monitored educational excursions. Past excursions include visits to the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, TN; the Audubon Aquarium of the Americas in New Orleans, LA; and the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science in Jackson, MS.

A second goal of the Summer Developmental Program is to monitor the academic progress and the social matriculation of the students throughout their undergraduate enrollment at Alcorn State University. The program provides students with individualized course consultation and recommendation. Staff members contact SDP students through oral and written communications to discuss attendance, coursework, grades, and university adjustment. The staff also maintains contact with the parents of SDP students to discuss coursework, student attendance, and university adjustment. Documentation of SDP students' university enrollment, course selections, and graduation is recorded as well.

The third goal Alcorn State University SDP is to assist students in gaining acceptance into a post-graduate educational program. The Summer Developmental Program provides students with correspondence regarding the requirements for post-graduate education and assists them in contacting and applying to potential graduate schools.

Program Results

SDP instructors are required to report to work from 8 a.m. until 4 p.m., Monday through Friday. During that time, the instructors provide focused

classroom instruction in reading, mathematics, English, and support lab/seminar. Additionally, the instructors are required to provide tutorials for the SDP students by maintaining online laboratory classes with the students and tutorial sessions. The SDP necessitates that the teachers provide the students 2,450 contact minutes for each three-credit hour course and an additional 4,900 contact minutes in the computer-assisted laboratory setting. Therefore, the SDP is a strenuous nine-week program with teacher-student interaction far beyond the classroom setting.

Alcorn State University maintains an average graduation rate of 43.2% (IHL, 2009); however, more than 68% of the students who participate in Alcorn's Summer Developmental Program graduate with no breaks in their college attendance (Oredein, personal communication, June 9, 2011). Oredein attributes the difference in the average graduation rate to the staff's performance within College for Excellence and their commitment to meeting, advising, and tracking the progress of the SDP students, even after they have graduated from the program. Oredein cited that another contributor to the success of the program is the selection of teachers chosen to work in the program. Typically, at least four of the six instructors are high school teachers who can relate to students with patience and understanding. Preuss (2009) also maintained that while many college professors expect students to be proficient with prerequisite skills, high school teachers are better suited to provide interventions and remediation. This supports Oredein's claim that staff members from the College for Excellence and the high school teachers contribute to the success rates of the SDP students.

Support does not stop there. SDP students are afforded the opportunity to participate in tutorial sessions, study groups, and online laboratory lessons to fortify their ability to demonstrate mastery of college-level content. These amenities are offered to the students until they demonstrate a 3.0 average or higher on a 4.0 GPA scale. If students feel the need for support even after attaining a 3.0 grade point average, the students are assigned an academic mentor to assist them further until they graduate. Additionally, the staff ensures that the students' parents are contacted and kept apprised of the students' progress, or the lack thereof, until the students graduate.

Conclusion

Oredein asserted that the Summer Developmental Program of Alcorn State University demonstrates the necessary components for students to achieve collegiate success: motivation, support, personal interaction, direct instruction, and opportunities for success among their peers. In the final analysis, students' academic performances are monitored not only during their time in the Alcorn State University Summer Developmental Program, but even after they graduate and become Alcorn State University alumni. This enables the College for Excellence to utilize them as exemplars for other summer developmental students—to show the SDP students that they too can attain professional careers and become ambassadors for Alcorn State University.

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