

# Academic Foundations: Strengthening the Foundation for Higher Education

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## **What challenge or issue were you addressing with your practicum project?**

Retention statistics for the least prepared students were much lower than students who entered the university with acceptable records. In practice, students who did not meet the admittance requirements for their desired major were allowed to begin as general study students. The hope was that they would either show that they could do college work required of their desired major or select a different major better suited to their skills. After adding freshman success courses for all students in 1997 and a summer bridge program for underprepared students in 2005, the administration chose to be proactive in helping the underprepared students. The academic foundations program began in the fall of 2006.

## **What theoretical underpinnings and research helped to formulate your practicum design?**

For many years, colleges and universities across the country have offered freshman year experience courses and programming to help students adjust to the changes between high school and college. While the literature supports using these courses, some students need additional developmental work in order to be successful. Thus, if colleges are going to admit under prepared students, these same colleges need to provide coursework to improve the students' capabilities. Without intervention, under prepared students are unlikely to successful.

According to Patricia Odell (1996) as stated in the ERIC abstract for her article "Avenues to Success in College: A Non-Credit Eight-Week Freshman Seminar" student success courses

are effective. “Students completing the course earned higher average grades, were less likely to experience academic difficulty, and dropped or failed fewer courses. The course was particularly beneficial for males” (p. 72-92). This is encouraging research for a school whose student body is 70% male. Yet at TSU, certain students were not persisting even after a freshman success course was mandated for all students in 1997.

Florence B. Brawer (1996) addressed college student success in her ERIC article “Retention-Attrition in the Nineties” providing more information about student success courses. This digest addresses “concern about retention and attrition rates [stating that] approximately 50 percent of the freshmen enrolled in colleges and universities drop out before completing their programs.” When one considers means to increase the retention and persistence rates of college students through graduation, many strategies merit investigation. “Intervention strategies in which colleges engage take on a variety of styles and types such as orientation and mentoring programs, and multiple strategy approaches.”

One’s approach to instruction comes back to the goals of the student success course: enhancing academic skills, acclimating students to a particular college, and easing the transition from high school to college. In his article “Improving Student Success through a Model ‘Introduction to Engineering’ Course” Raymond B. Landis (1996) addresses issues that need to be considered not only for an engineering course but also for any freshman success course. Landis focuses on five key areas: “a supportive academic community; effective study strategies; improved self-confidence, interpersonal communication skills, and organizational and leadership skills; an increased awareness of the value of an education; and orientation to the culture, environments and resources of the college or university.”

Many of the recommendations for a successful freshman year experience course can also be used to provide developmental remediation for students who are under prepared. David Arendale cited that, “Proponents of developmental education view it as a more comprehensive model regarding the student because it focuses on development of the person in both the academic and affective domains” (2005).

Arendale went on to state that “ effective developmental education programs provide educational experiences appropriate to each student’s level of ability, ensure standards of academic excellence, and build the academic and personal skills necessary to succeed in subsequent courses or on the job”(2005). In other words, we must meet the students where they are academically when they enter our institutions.

Certainly the literature supports the assertion that some students require more help than others if they are going to be successful at the college level.

**Describe the model/program/strategy that was implemented, and include basic demographic information related to the participants and institution.**

This study will provide data that should support the use of a specific program, Academic Foundations, for students who may not be prepared to perform college level work. It is important to verify that such a program can help students continue in their college work. This study is determining success based upon final semester gpa and persistence to complete a college degree. Other factors have not been considered for the purpose of this study. The population used for this study were students admitted to TSU over the past five years whose high school records indicate that they are not prepared for the rigors of college level work.

In order to establish a baseline, statistics for underprepared students were researched to determine how many students succeeded in their college endeavors.

Nine underprepared students began at TSU in the fall of 2002. By spring 0f 2007 three of these students had graduated. The remaining students were dismissed or withdrew. Retention rate to graduation: 33%.Sixteen underprepared students began at TSU in the fall of 2003. By spring 0f 2007 five of these students have graduated or will complete degrees. The remaining students were dismissed or withdrew. Retention rate to graduation: 31%.

Twenty underprepared students began at TSU in the fall of 2004.By spring 0f 2007 four of these students have graduated or will complete degrees. The remaining students were dismissed or withdrew. Retention rate to graduation: 20%.Nineteen underprepared students began at TSU in the fall of 2005. By spring 0f 2007 five of these students have graduated or will complete degrees. The remaining students were dismissed or withdrew. For PASS 5/19 =26% graduation rate. PASS students were identified as being underprepared and came for a one week summer orientation.

The academic foundations program began the fall of 2006. It targeted students who were not admissible into their desired majors.

<p><b>Figure 1: Academic Foundation (AF) Students Entering Fall 2006 (Academic Foundations students are comparable to PASS Students from Fall 2005.)</b></p>	<p>Results after completing program (fall and spring semester)</p>	<p>Major Declared</p>	<p>GPA end of second semester</p>	<p>Beginning “major” designation</p>
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Beginning semester				
FA2006	withdrew fa06		0	AF
FA2006	dismissed sp07		0	AF
FA2006	withdrew fa06		0.1	AF
FA2006	withdrew fa06		0.28	AF
FA2006	dismissed sp07		0.8	AF
FA2006	withdrew fa06		0.81	AF
FA2006	withdrew fa06		1.05	AF
FA2006	probation sp07		1.2	AF
FA2006	withdrew fa06		1.25	AF
FA2006	probation sp07	SM	1.3	AF
FA2006	probation sp07		1.31	AF
FA2006	probation sp07		1.47	AF
FA2006	probation sp07		1.5	AF
FA2006	expected grad sp10	SM	1.71	AF
FA2006	expected grad sp10	GM	1.72	AF
FA2006	expected grad sp10	GM	1.82	AF
FA2006	expected grad sp10	GM	1.92	AF
FA2006	expected grad sp10	SM	2	AF
FA2006	expected grad sp10		2.06	AF
FA2006	expected grad sp10	COM	2.3	AF
FA2006	expected grad sp10		2.31	AF
FA2006	withdrew fa06		2.31	AF
FA2006	expected grad sp10		2.74	AF
FA2006	expected grad sp10	L-ED	3.09	AF
FA2006	expected grad sp10		3.18	AF

Figure 1: Twenty-five students began the Academic Foundations program at TSU in the fall of 2006. By spring 0f 2007 nineteen of these students are expected to complete degrees. The remaining students were dismissed or withdrew. For AF 16/25 is 64% retention rate.

**Findings** Although a review of the literature clearly indicated the importance of a freshman year experience type course for new college students, the statistics compiled over that past five years as well as information gleaned from the Kellogg Institute 2006 indicate that it is also necessary for some college students to receive additional support. At Tri-State University in Angola, Indiana, this support is provided to students admitted under the Academic Foundations program. Launched during the fall of 2006, this program has affirmed that even the least prepared college students can succeed given effective guidance.

## **Recommendations**

Promote student success by facilitating the Academic Foundations Program for students who are not admissible into their desired college majors. New students with weak academic backgrounds will be required to participate and will be admitted to college on a conditional basis. Once students meet the requirements for admission to their desired majors, they will be able to declare those majors.

Since many weak students need to improve their reading skills in order to handle the rigors of college level reading, this program will provide intense instruction concerning improvement of reading in content areas.

The Academic Foundations programming will provide developmental students with information and experiences to ease their transition to college level courses. At the completion of this course they will have a better understanding of their learning strengths and weaknesses. They will have the tools that they need to complete academic assignments proficiently.

At the conclusion of the developmental course for the Academic Foundations program, students will possess the tools and skills necessary to complete the following:

1. Establish personal goals and a plan for success.
2. Apply academic success skills to college learning.
3. Understand and practice methods for effective college reading and writing.
4. Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of campus support systems, especially Academic Support Services, the TSU Learning Center, the TSU Writing Center, the Math Help Sessions, the Library, and Counseling Services.
5. Understand and practice methods for effective course, major and career decision making.

This information below was compiled after the practicum report was submitted.

**Figure 2: Retention statistics first three years of the Academic foundations program.**

	Fall 2006 AF/Total Cohort	Fall 2007 AF/Total Cohort	Fall 2008 AF/Total Cohort
Freshman Cohort	<b>25/317</b>	<b>31/413</b>	<b>18/423</b>
Fall to Spring Retention Stats	<b>16/279</b> <b>64%/88%</b>	<b>24/373</b> <b>77%/90.3%</b>	<b>18/401</b> <b>100%/94.8%</b>
Fall Sophomore Retention Stats	<b>11/210</b> <b>39%/66.2%</b>	<b>17/283</b> <b>55%/68.5%</b>	<b>11/305</b> <b>63%/72%</b>
Spring Sophomore Retention Stats	<b>10/199</b> <b>36%/62.8%</b>	<b>15/265</b> <b>48/64%</b>	
Fall Junior Retention Stats	<b>7/183</b> <b>25%/57.7%</b>	<b>11/235</b> <b>35/57%</b>	
Spring Junior Retention Stats	<b>7/181</b> <b>25%/57%</b>		
Fall Senior Retention Stats	<b>6/172</b> <b>21%/54%</b>		

The program continued until 2012. Each year saw tweaks to the format of the class. In 2012 admission requirements were changed, so what would have been the academic foundation students were no longer admitted and the program ended.

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