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## MONTHLYDIAGNOSTIC

March 2013

# Why Rethinking Developmental Education is a Priority



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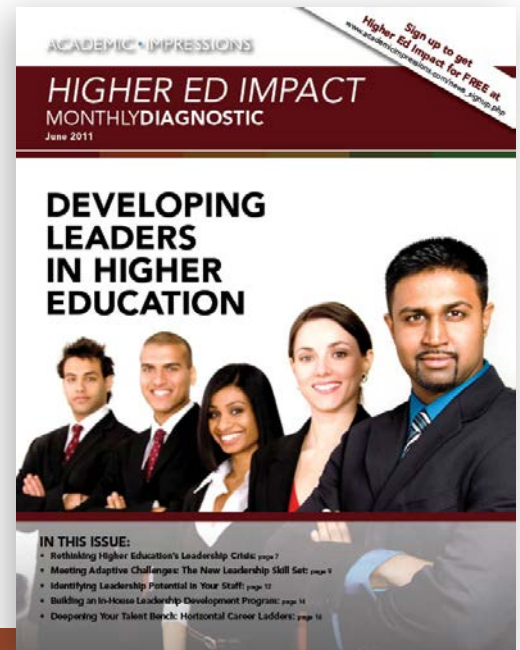
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## A LETTER FROM AMIT MRIG PRESIDENT, ACADEMIC IMPRESSIONS

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Given public and federal pressures on college completion, several higher education and policy groups have recently shone the spotlight on developmental education. Recent studies suggest that half of all undergraduates will take at least one remedial course, but that only a small minority of students in remedial courses goes on to complete a degree or certificate. Developmental education proves costly for open enrollment and moderately selective institutions alike, draining institutional resources with little return.

Most institutions take an additive approach to serving academically underprepared students, investing in additional academic support services and staff. Without challenging the traditional model for placing students and providing developmental courses, this approach proves unsustainable.

We interviewed academic leaders at two-year and four-year institutions that offer effective alternative approaches to traditional developmental education. These institutions have:

- Adopted more informed approaches to placement of students in gateway courses
- Replaced non-credit “remedial education” with credit-bearing courses
- Replaced prerequisite courses with corequisite workshops or other academic support
- Accelerated the integration of academically underprepared students into the regular curriculum

Through these efforts, they have seen significant gains in retention and completion rates. We hope their advice will be useful to you.



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Download this PDF and read this issue's articles online:

<http://www.academicimpressions.com/news/why-rethinking-developmental-education-priority>



## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

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### **REDESIGNING DEVELOPMENTAL COURSES TO IMPROVE RETENTION**

APRIL 8, 2013 - 1:00 TO 2:30 PM EDT :: WEBCAST

### **SUMMER BRIDGE PROGRAMS: TWO CORE ELEMENTS FOR SUCCESS**

MAY 16, 2013 - 1:00 TO 2:30 PM EDT & MAY 23, 2013 - 1:00 TO 2:30 PM EDT :: WEBCAST

### **MEASURING THE COSTS OF DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION**

MAY 20, 2013 - 1:00 TO 2:30 PM EST :: WEBCAST

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# Why Rethinking Developmental Education is a Priority



## REASSESSING THE COSTS AND BENEFITS OF DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION

Reports over the past several years from the Lumina Foundation, Complete College America, and other policy and research groups have documented the high cost of developmental education, measured not only in dollars spent but in student attrition rates. In fact, “Core Principles for Transforming Remedial Education,” a recent joint statement and meta-analysis provided by the Charles A. Dana Center, Complete College America, the Education Commission of the States, and Jobs for the Future, reported that:

- Half of all undergraduates (and 70% of students enrolled at community colleges) take at least one remedial course.
- Only about one quarter of community college students who take a remedial course graduate within eight years.

- On average, less than half of students in remedial reading courses complete the remedial sequence, and only one third of students in remedial math courses complete that remedial sequence.

## THE COST OF PROVIDING DEVELOPMENTAL COURSES

Not only do developmental courses fail badly at their purpose—that of remediating gaps in student learning so that academically underprepared students can register for first-year courses with a higher degree of successfully completing them—developmental courses also drain considerable institutional resources. Given that half of all entering students are placed in at least one developmental course, the costs of providing this instruction are significant, with colleges in the US investing as much as an estimated \$1.4-\$2 billion a year in the effort (though the Alliance for Excellent Education estimates an even higher total cost of \$2.8 billion a year).

A study of the costs at Ohio's public institutions found that these colleges spent approximately \$15 million teaching 260,000 credit hours of remedial courses to 20,000 freshmen over the course of a year.

Last year, the Texas legislature appropriated \$206 million in general revenue funds for the instructional costs of developmental education for public institutions.

## OTHER COSTS TO CONSIDER

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Laura Hope, dean of instructional support at Chaffey College, frames the issue a little differently, noting that as a community college, her institution has a "moral imperative" to preserve access. "We can't allow students to languish, term after term, in developmental courses," Hope argues, "because these students are then, without progress, occupying seats at the institution that could go to new, incoming students."

There is a cost associated with each incoming student, a cost that can be measured in classroom space, faculty time, and support services. When considering the financial impact of developmental education on your institution, Hope advises: "Rather than think about tuition and revenue, think about assets. We see the availability of a seat as an asset that we can measure. We may not be able to quantify this to an exact dollar figure, but it is clearly a crucial asset, and we need to think about the cost of preserving that asset."



The more students who complete their degree or certificate, the more new students you can enroll.

**Laura Hope, Chaffey College**



## THE PICTURE DOESN'T HAVE TO BE THIS GRIM

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When we surveyed academic leaders on the issue, respondents expressed some degree of resignation over the inefficacy yet apparent necessity of remedial courses. Two-thirds of respondents felt that it was a priority to address the issue, but nearly all of the academic leaders who did were looking to address the problem through additive support services, such as peer mentoring and student tutoring, or advocating for more resources to be allocated to the writing center or the math lab.

Hardly any of those responding to our survey indicated that revisiting either placement of academically underprepared students or revamping the model for the developmental education curriculum were on the table.

Yet there is overwhelming data to suggest that the traditional model for delivering a developmental education sequence is both broken and costly. Why continue to pour dollars—and students—into a model that doesn't work? There are proven and attested alternatives.

Chaffey College's attrition numbers used to look like the national average—until they overhauled their developmental education program, beginning in 1999. Since then, their success rate has grown about 36%, with 69% of their students enrolled in developmental courses earning a C or better, and with 68% of their students following up on success in one course with success in the course following it.

Tristan Denley, provost at Austin Peay State University, cites similar gains. Prior to his redesign of Austin Peay's developmental curriculum, only 30% of entering students were able to complete their core math requirement within 2 years; after the redesign, that number increased to 67%. For the core English requirement, that pre-redesign completion rate was 54%; after the redesign, 76%.

Martin Golson, Austin Peay's director of academic support, notes that moving students more quickly into credit-bearing classes increases the percentage of students who persist and ensures that students are spending their tuition dollars on courses that will count towards their graduation requirements.

There are proven models for restructuring developmental education, with documented impact on tuition dollars, attrition rates, and student success rates.

## **SUMMER BRIDGE PROGRAMS: TWO CORE ELEMENTS FOR SUCCESS**

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May 16, 2013 - 1:00 to 2:30 pm EDT &  
May 23, 2013 - 1:00 to 2:30 pm EDT

Webcast

**Learn new ideas for integrating community-  
and academic confidence-building strategies  
to improve the impact of your summer bridge  
program.**





## PLACING STUDENTS IN GATEWAY COURSES: A MORE INFORMED APPROACH

One of the most insidious, documented effects of the traditional pipeline of developmental courses on an incoming student is the fatigue of taking multiple non-credit courses (or, in some cases, being required to retake a non-credit course repeatedly). Tristan Denley, provost at Austin Peay State University, calls this course sequence the “slow death.”

Your goal should be to move developmental students as quickly as possible into credit-bearing courses that count toward their academic degree or certificate. This shortens the time to graduation; it also builds a student’s confidence and their sense of momentum toward their academic goals, increasing the likelihood that they will persist and succeed.

As you reconsider the sequence and design of your developmental education programming, also reconsider your approach to placement. Does the standard policy of placing students, on the basis of their high school transcripts, in specific levels of developmental coursework serve the student and

your institution well—or are there more nuanced, effective approaches to placement?

### FAST-TRACK PLACEMENT

Valencia College has revisited their placement criteria as a key part of their strategy to accelerate the progress of academically underprepared students. Reviewing standardized test scores for incoming students, Valencia identifies the top 25% of those students who would place in developmental education -- and moves those students instead into credit-bearing, first-year courses. VC identifies the top 25% of those students who would place in developmental education—and moves those students instead into credit-bearing, first-year courses. VC then provides supplemental workshops and peer mentors to assist these students in bridging the gap, and coaches faculty to teach study skills as part of the curriculum.

### THE ROLE OF NON-COGNITIVE ASSESSMENTS

What if you could predict, with greater accuracy, which academically underprepared students would be most likely to persist and thrive? And what if this factored into decisions on placement—rather than allowing placement to be a rote response to

standardized test scores and high school GPA in certain key subjects?

After all, a student's ability to persist and succeed is not driven solely by their level of academic preparation. A student interested in a STEM major who performed well in high school but did not have the opportunity to take the necessary math courses may actually be prepared to catch up quickly, if you can identify that student, place the student more appropriately, and provide the necessary support.

Citing a 2004 meta-analysis, Paul Gore, the student success special projects coordinator at the University of Utah and the past director of the Career Transitions Research Department at ACT, notes six non-cognitive variables that appear to have the greatest impact on an institution's ability to identify those students who are likely to succeed and maintain momentum toward their degree. These are not the only non-cognitive variables that impact student success (for example, communication skills are also important), but these are the six variables that, when assessed together with other traditional, cognitive variables, offered an incremental increase in predictive accuracy.

These included:

- Indicators of academic performance, such as academic engagement (the student's diligence in their studies) and academic efficacy (the student's confidence in their ability to complete academic milestones)
- Indicators of academic persistence, such as educational commitment (the student's motivation for achieving a degree) and educational engagement in extra-curricular activities
- Indicators of emotional development and maturity, such as resilience in response to stress and comfort level in social settings

Gore recommends employing a non-cognitive assessment (of which there are many currently on the market) during the admissions process, to help predict which students possess the non-cognitive skills that drive student success.



LEARN MORE

Here are two resources for digging further:

- Read our article "[Predicting Student Success: When SAT and GPA Are Not Enough](#)"
- Get our October 2012 recorded webcast "[Developing Academic Stamina in First-Year Students](#)"

## A SHIFT IN MINDSET: WHAT ACTUALLY NEEDS TO BE REMEDIATED?

Besides reconsidering criteria for various levels of placement, it may be time to take a fresh look at which cases actually require developmental placement at all. Austin Peay State University has done some remarkable work in aligning the degree of developmental support required with the academic and career goals of the student.

In the past, colleges and universities have looked at students entering with a deficiency and have focused on identifying what the student did not learn or perhaps forgot. Then they look backward and remediate that. What if we instead looked forward, and asked instead, “What does this student need in order to be successful?”

**Martin Golson, Austin Peay State University**

Golson believes this is a crucial difference. “Let’s say we have a nursing student who has some deficiencies in intermediate algebra,” Golson suggests. “Perhaps this student has real difficulties with imaginary numbers. But nurses never deal with imaginary numbers, either in their academic nursing program or in the field. So there is no need to remediate this. Why would we place that student in developmental math, when they could succeed as an excellent nurse, never having to work with imaginary numbers?”

Golson cautions that this isn’t about defining higher education as job training. It’s about identifying specific academic and career goals with incoming students, and then focusing on providing the education needed to help them achieve those goals. It’s about reconsidering decades-old placement policies and defining clearly when remediation or developmental support is actually needed—and when it isn’t, and for what reasons.

## **REDESIGNING DEVELOPMENTAL COURSES TO IMPROVE RETENTION**

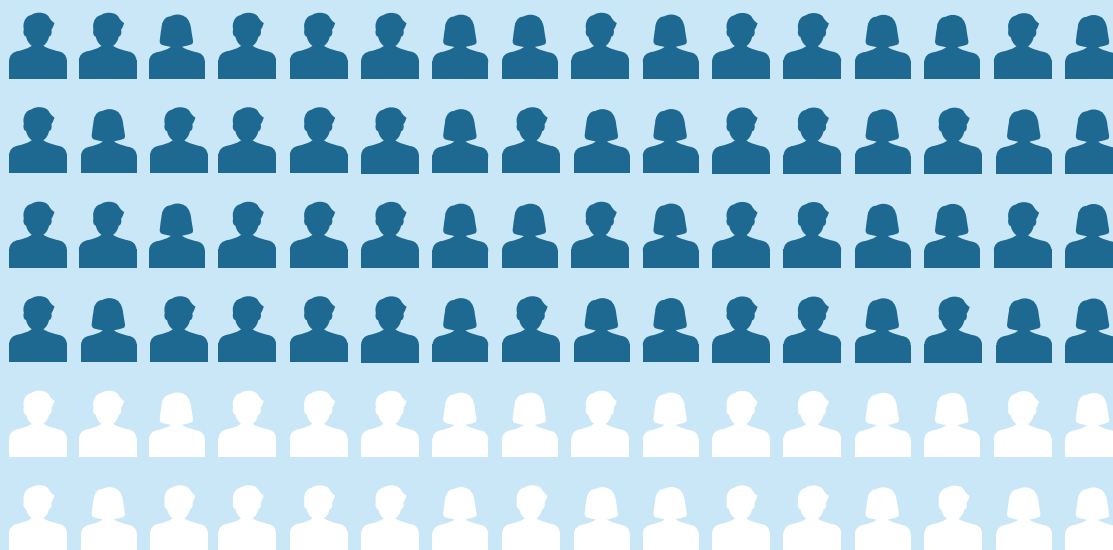
April 8, 2013 :: Webcast

**Learn how using the SLA/linked-coursework model for developmental courses can improve degree completion rates.**

..... 44% .....

*of college students*

# WON'T MAKE IT TO THEIR SECOND YEAR



ACT Institutional File Data 2012

.....

*We can help move the needle for retention on  
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- Data Audit
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- Peer Leadership
- Advising
- International Student Support
- Faculty Roles in Retention

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WITH AN INITIAL CONVERSATION



## A FRESH LOOK AT THE DEVELOPMENTAL ED CURRICULUM

Institutions that have made real strides in improving retention and academic success rates for academically underprepared students have focused not only on revisiting their policies around academic placement but also on revamping their developmental education curriculum.

Let's take a close look at two successful—though quite different—models:

- The **assisted learning** approach: replacing prerequisite courses with corequisite coursework
- The **fast track** approach: accelerating the prerequisite or developmental track

### THE ASSISTED LEARNING APPROACH

Dispensing with the traditional developmental sequence altogether, Austin Peay State University places its academically underprepared students immediately into the regular first-year courses—but adds two corequisite, non-credit hours of Structured Learning Assistance (SLA), funded by a \$75 lab fee.”

When a student arrives with ACT scores indicating they are not college-ready, a low math ACT or a low reading/writing score, we enroll them in a credit-bearing course the moment they walk on campus. We don't hold them back and lock them into the slow death of a pipeline of non-credit developmental courses. Instead, we move them into their first year and assist them in those courses.

**Tristan Denley, Austin Peay State University**

Austin Peay's "Structured Learning Assistance" (SLA) workshops have been so successful that the National Center for Academic Transformation (NCAT) included Austin Peay's linked workshop model as one of their six recommended models for redesigning developmental courses. SLA workshops are provided to assist students in math, writing, and reading, and offer students the assistance of undergraduate peer mentors, graduate student mentors, and (for those with a reading deficiency) reading coaches.

The faculty teaching the first-year course write the pre- and post-tests for the supplemental workshop and work closely with the SLA leader heading the workshop to ensure the quality of the structured

learning assistance offered. SLA leaders receive a two-day training prior to leading their first workshop, and are assessed through classroom observation once each term.

Martin Golson, Austin Peay's director of academic support, adds this perspective on the SLA approach: "A student who completes college-level work for an area is deemed to have removed deficiency in that area. They take a college-level math course with structured assistance and they pass it; that removes their math deficiency, without having to do remedial education."



### AN INTERMEDIATE APPROACH

Unlike Austin Peay State University, Valencia College has not taken the step of eliminating non-credit developmental courses entirely, but they have helped their academically underprepared students build momentum toward their degree by:

- Taking the top 25% of students placing in developmental education and registering them directly into the regular credit-bearing courses
- Subsuming the content of the second course in a two-course developmental track into the regular credit-bearing courses or into supplemental, corequisite workshops
- Training faculty who are teaching first-year courses to include study skills in their curriculum
- Fostering a learning community and peer mentoring for academically underprepared students

## THE FAST TRACK APPROACH

Chaffey College took a different path. Rather than replace prerequisite developmental courses with corequisite workshops, Chaffey College transitioned their developmental courses from non-credit to

credit and looked aggressively for responsible, rigorous, and effective ways to accelerate the developmental curriculum.

In the nineties, Chaffey College had a developmental track of five reading courses and three pre-collegiate English courses. In revising this slow developmental sequence, here's what Laura Hope, Chaffey's dean of instructional support, and her colleagues did:

- Condensed that developmental curriculum into 2 developmental English courses, and made them credit-bearing (2 credits each)
- Split the semester term into two sections of eight weeks each, offering "Fast Track" or accelerated sections of those developmental courses

Now, a student who is academically underprepared at the time of enrollment isn't told to take multiple semesters of non-credit developmental coursework. Instead, that student is directed to take one semester of for-credit, intensive coursework.

"What we have seen," Hope explains, "is exponential success in students who are in that compressed curriculum, especially in males."

In fact, focus groups with students revealed that the accelerated pace kept them engaged in their studies; they felt compelled to work more closely with their classmates and to interact regularly with their instructors. Feedback from the faculty indicated that the instructors also benefited from the compressed pace, in that the Fast Track forced them to think through their pedagogy very intentionally.

This approach takes the stigma out of developmental education. Students see that they have momentum toward reaching their goals. They believe they are on the fast track to success.

**Laura Hope, Chaffey College**

Chaffey College has made this program particularly effective by also:

- **Offering some sections of the regular first-year courses in Fast Track mode.** A student who places in the second course of a two-course developmental sequence can feasibly complete that dev-ed course in the first eight weeks of the term and then go on to complete the first course toward their degree in the second half of the same term, *losing no time in their progress toward the degree.*
- **Revisiting add/drop dates.** Chaffey College realized that students who added a course at the end of the third week in the term (the historical last day to add) were the least likely to succeed in the course. So Chaffey truncated the amount of time a student has to add a course to the first six days of the term, and then used Fast Track to offer a second registration point, allowing students to register for a course for the second eight weeks of the term.
- **Integrating Fast Track with true developmental advising.** It's not just about moving students through courses faster; it's about helping students move smarter, by holding in-depth conversations with students about their goals, and coaching advisors to engage in collaborative problem-solving to help students chart their course toward those goals.



### IS YOUR DEVELOPMENTAL ADVISING EFFECTIVE?

In our [April 2012 article](#) on developmental advising, Susan Ohrablo, a doctoral enrollment counselor with the Abraham S. Fischler School of Education at Nova Southeastern University, offers practical suggestions for coaching and training your advisors.



## THE SUMMER BRIDGE APPROACH

A growing number of institutions have invested in summer bridge programs to help high school seniors or transfer students enter their first term more academically prepared. Yet recent studies of developmental summer bridge programs -- **such as this one in Texas** -- have found that most such programs achieve only minimal boosts in student retention.

Yet a handful of highly effective summer bridge programs have shown increases of 10% or more. Truly “leveling the playing field” for academically under-prepared students requires more than just getting them up to speed in academic knowledge or even awareness of academic support services. The key:

- A focus on building a peer community/cohort
- Programming that is designed to build academic confidence and “grit”

To learn more, join Academic Impressions **online on May 16 and May 23, 2013** and learn what made summer bridge programs at the University of Central Florida and Pulaski Technical College successful.

# AI Contributors



## **Amit Mrig**

**PRESIDENT, ACADEMIC IMPRESSIONS**

Amit co-founded Academic Impressions in 2002 to provide a variety of educational products and services that help higher education administrators tackle key, strategic challenges. Since 2002, AI has designed and directed hundreds of conferences and has served representatives from over 3,500 higher education institutions. Besides designing and leading events for cabinet-level officers focused on strategic planning, budgeting, and leadership development, Amit leads Academic Impressions' ongoing research into the five- and 10-year challenges facing higher education and plays a lead role in outlining each issue of *Higher Ed Impact: Monthly Diagnostic* to highlight how college and university leaders can take an institution-wide approach to answering those challenges.



## **Daniel Fusch**

**DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS,  
ACADEMIC IMPRESSIONS**

At Academic Impressions, Daniel provides strategic direction and content for AI's electronic publication *Higher Ed Impact*, including market research and interviews with leading subject matter experts on critical issues. Since the publication's launch in 2009, Daniel has written more than 250 articles on strategic issues ranging from student recruitment and retention to development and capital planning. Daniel previously served as a conference director for Academic Impressions, developing training programs focused on issues related to campus sustainability, capital planning, and facilities management. Prior to joining Academic Impressions, Daniel served as adjunct faculty for the University of Denver. Daniel holds a Ph.D. in English.





**Tunde Brimah**

**SENIOR CONFERENCE DIRECTOR, ACADEMIC IMPRESSIONS**

Tunde specializes in Academic Impressions' professional development offerings in instructional technology and academic affairs. His work with AI has included innovative and practical professional development offerings on emerging topics such as accountability for student learning, creating significant teaching and learning experiences, copyright compliance, formative/summative faculty evaluation processes, online/blended and mobile learning, and social media in teaching and learning among others. He researches conference topics, designs the curricula, and selects faculty to offer in-depth and interactive in-person and Web conferences.

Tunde's educational background is in educational technology, leadership innovation, and policy. His professional experience includes years of teaching at the college and graduate level. He has also worked with national, state, and local legislatures as a researcher/policy analyst on educational, health, and legislative management issues. Tunde is a Ph.D. candidate in educational leadership and innovation with a concentration in administrative leadership and policy studies at the University of Colorado Denver. He holds an MPA and MA from UCD and University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, respectively, and a BA from Loyola University Chicago.

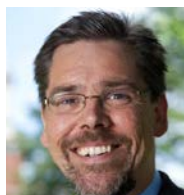


**Lisa Wexler**

**CONFERENCE DIRECTOR, ACADEMIC IMPRESSIONS**

Lisa currently works on researching and designing online and in-person conferences in the area of student affairs. Her main areas of content research and programming are academic advising, support services, study abroad, international student support, peer mentoring and first-year student programming. Previously, she was a faculty lecturer at the University of Denver's English Language Center, where, in addition to teaching, she served on the curriculum committee and coordinated orientations and a conversation program for international students. She completed her MA in Literature, BA in English and minor in Education at the University of Colorado—Boulder. She also completed a graduate endorsement in Linguistically Diverse Education from the University of Northern Colorado. Lisa has presented at state and national conferences on best practices in teaching literacy skills, writing instruction, and using technology in the language classroom.

# Contributors



## **Tristan Denley**

**PROVOST, AUSTIN PEAY STATE UNIVERSITY**

Dr. Tristan Denley has served as Austin Peay's provost and vice president for academic and student affairs since January 2009. Originally from Penzance, England, Tristan held positions in Sweden, Canada and the University of Mississippi before coming to Austin Peay. At Ole Miss, Tristan served as Chair of Mathematics, before assuming the role of Senior Fellow of their Residential College. His mathematical research interests include Graph Theory and Combinatorics. In addition to mathematics, he enjoys cooking, reading, and playing the guitar.

Throughout his career, he has taken a hands-on approach in a variety of initiatives for student success. In 2007, he was chosen as a Redesign Scholar by the National Center for Academic Transformation for his work in rethinking the teaching of freshmen mathematics classes. He is now involved in exploring models for course redesign in a variety of disciplines.



## **Martin Golson**

**DIRECTOR OF ACADEMIC SUPPORT, AUSTIN PEAY STATE UNIVERSITY**

Mr. Golson oversees the new Academic Support Center and previously served as the instructional specialist at Austin Peay State University. He was an important member of the team that redesigned two developmental courses, Elementary Algebra and Intermediate Algebra, by integrating them with two college-level math courses, Mathematical Thought and Practice and Statistics. This project was part of the Tennessee Board of Regent's Developmental Studies Redesign Initiative (2006-2009) which was undertaken in collaboration with NCAT. The redesign produced the Linked Workshop model, which links individualized, computer-based instruction in workshops to traditional instruction in the classroom to allow students to earn core course credit while removing their mathematics deficiency. Martin is a recipient of Clarksville-Montgomery County School System's Point of Light Award. He earned a BS in mathematics and an MA in education from Austin Peay State University.



**Paul Gore**

**ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AND TRAINING DIRECTOR, SCHOOL COUNSELING AND LICENSED PROFESSIONAL COUNSELING PROGRAMS, UNIVERSITY OF UTAH**

Paul is the student success special projects coordinator at the University of Utah in addition to his roles as professor, training director for graduate counseling programs, and director of institutional research. Prior to coming to the University of Utah, Paul held faculty appointments at Southern Illinois University and the University of Missouri-Kansas City. He also served as the director of the Career Transitions Research Department at ACT in Iowa City. Paul currently serves as the chair of the Society for Vocational Psychology and on an advisory board to the vice president of science for the Society of Counseling Psychology. Paul's research interests focus on the motivational aspects of high school and college students' success, and on understanding and promoting effective career and life planning. He consults with institutions on the topic of non-cognitive skill testing and teaching and has written numerous articles and presented nationally on the topic of student success. He is currently journal editor for the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.



**Laura Hope**

**DEAN OF INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT, CHAFFEY COLLEGE**

At Chaffey College, Laura serves as a Professor of English and supervises a number of college-wide initiatives designed to enhance, improve, and diversify access to learning, including distance education, the college's success centers (including the Faculty Success Center), the honors program, professional development, student learning outcomes, supplemental instruction, Title V grant and activities, and the academic library. Laura was a leader in the development of Chaffey College's success centers and was a co-founder of the college's associate's degree program for inmates at the California Institution for women.

Laura has remained actively involved in the advancement of the Basic Skills Initiative in California since its inception in 2006 through the co-authorship of the "poppy copy" and leadership in training and conference presentations. She recently co-authored the book *Student Success in Community Colleges: a Practical Guide to Developmental Education* (Jossey-Bass, 2010). Recently, Laura has worked with the RP Group of California on a number of research initiatives including an evaluation of developmental education practices in California, and primers on contextualized teaching and learning and reading apprenticeship. Laura is also on the Board of the RP Group.