

## **Remediation nation: Millions of college students first have to catch up on high school work**

JUSTIN POPE | AP Education Writer ; *Newsday*: September 15, 2008

It's a tough lesson for millions of students just now arriving on campus: even if you have a high school diploma, you may not be ready for college.

In fact, a new study calculates, one-third of American college students have to enroll in remedial classes. The bill to colleges and taxpayers for trying to bring them up to speed on material they were supposed to learn in high school comes to between \$2.3 billion and \$2.9 billion annually.

"That is a very large cost, but there is an additional cost and that's the cost to the students," said former Colorado governor Roy Romer, chair of the group Strong American Schools, which is issuing the report "Diploma to Nowhere" on Monday. "These students come out of high school really misled. They think they're prepared. They got a 3.0 and got through the curriculum they needed to get admitted, but they find what they learned wasn't adequate."

Christina Jeronimo was an "A" student in high school English, but was placed in a remedial course when she arrived at Long Beach City College in California. The course was valuable in some ways but frustrating and time-consuming. Now in her third year of community college, she'd hoped to transfer to UCLA by now.

Like many college students, she wishes she'd been worked a little harder in high school.

"There's a gap," said Jeronimo, who hopes to study psychology. "The demands of the high school teachers aren't as great as the demands for college. Sometimes they just baby us."

The problem of colleges devoting huge amounts of time and money to remediation isn't new, though its scale and cost has been difficult to measure. The latest report gives somewhat larger estimates than some previous studies, though it is not out of line with trends suggested in others, said Hunter Boylan, an expert at Appalachian State University in North Carolina, who was not connected with the report.

Analyzing federal data, the report estimates 43 percent of community college students require remediation, as do 29 percent of students at public four-year universities, with higher numbers in some places. For instance, four in five Oklahoma community college students need remedial coursework, and three in five in the giant California State university system need help in English, math or both.

The cost per student runs to as much as \$2,000 per student in community colleges and \$2,500 in four-year universities.

Jeronimo was hardly alone at Long Beach City College, where 95 percent of students need remedial coursework, according to President Eloy Oakley.

"It's the number one issue to Long Beach City College and the entire California community college system, easily," Oakley said. "I don't believe that the public in general really understands the magnitude of the problem."

Simply dumping the remedial students into large classes isn't necessarily expensive for colleges, although it's also not very effective. But smaller classes typically require more attention and money. Some states have refused to fund remedial courses at the university level. In California, Oakley said, state funding for community colleges favors credit courses. Remediation (or "basic skills" as he and many educators call it) is typically noncredit.

Educators are working to improve remedial courses. Long Beach is developing "success areas" that give extra time and attention to students. Community colleges in Tennessee have completely redesigned giant introductory and remedial courses where many students were struggling.

Boylan says colleges are learning such courses must also teach study skills to be effective.

Indeed, students often report that the hardest aspect of the transition to college isn't the material. It's the new rhythm and structure of college-level work.

"One of the things that they don't teach in high school is time management," Jeronimo said.

Eric Paris, who earned a 3.8 high school GPA but is finding his freshman year at Virginia Tech much more challenging, says the big difference is "it's all on my own." In class, "it's up to me if I want to sit on Facebook or pay attention." He, too, wishes he'd taken more challenging high school classes but thought a high GPA was more important.

Boylan says the gap between what high schools teach and what colleges expect isn't the only problem. He says there's often a mismatch, with high schools and colleges teaching material in different ways.

It's true that only recently have K-12 and higher education begun talking seriously about aligning standards. But Romer, who has also headed the Los Angeles Unified School District, doesn't buy that it's a communication problem.

"We're not expecting enough of our youngsters and the institutions that train them," he said.

**Directions:**

- Annotate – show evidence of close reading (see "article annotation" handout for expectations)
- Answer the **questions**. . .

1. Is the need for remediation a significant problem? *Cite evidence* from the article, correctly quoting from the article at least once, to support your answer.


2. Why are so many college students unable to handle college-level work? *Cite evidence* from the article, correctly quoting from the article at least once, to support your answer.


3. Would these struggling students be able to succeed in college if only they had pushed themselves a little harder in high school? Why? Why not? Be specific.


4. Do (your) high school teachers and administrators expect too little of their students? Be specific.


5. Should colleges lower their standards so more students can pass courses without remedial work? Be specific
