

A Pilot Project in First-Year Math

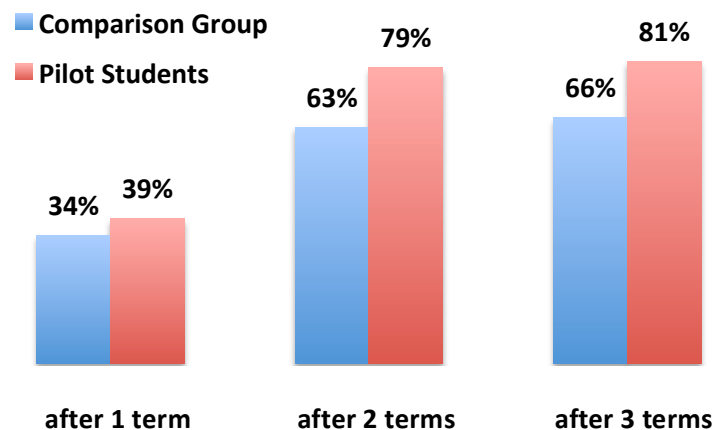
When a course of action is known to help students succeed, should we require students to follow that course? As a community college, choice is in our DNA. We are all about access, options and self-determination. Our students are adults, or approaching adulthood, with individual circumstances and needs that often call for customized solutions. **However choice becomes the enemy of success when students are allowed to make poor decisions, and choice becomes the enemy of equity when too many at-risk students follow low-success pathways.** An example at Lane may be a tendency for students with the greatest needs in writing and math to avoid taking writing and math.

Given what we know about the importance of early writing and math completions, Achieving the Dream at Lane has recommended taking steps to more strongly encourage, perhaps even mandate, early and sustained attempts in these subjects for students who need them. Recently, a small scale First-Year Math Pilot Project was launched to study the effects of requiring early and sustained math attempts among new AAOT students with low initial math placements (Math 10 or Math 20) by advising them to attempt math in their first term and placing registration restrictions on students who did not. Restrictions were removed after follow-up communications in which students were advised around the issue of math and then asked to agree to enroll in math the next term. The same procedure was repeated for students who avoided math in subsequent terms. The intent was not to raise barriers to registration but to change student culture to include the default assumption that *if you need math you take math*.

In a comparison of the first fall cohort of pilot students (2016, n = 170) to corresponding students in the previous two years (n = 432),

- Pilot students were more likely to pass at least one math course during their first three terms at Lane (see the graph);
- Pilot students passed an average of 1.54 math courses during their first three terms, 13% more than comparison students;
- These effects were seen despite a trend toward *fewer* math completions among all new AAOT students in this time period.

Percentage of Students Passing at least 1 Math Course



It should be stressed that this is a small pilot project affecting a small fraction of Lane students who need math to reach their goals. Writing is not included in the project, and interventions are informal and labor intensive. A sustainable first-year math or first-year writing program at scale would require more detailed treatment protocols and better automation of student messaging and registration procedures. The Dream Core Team plans to formulate an implementation team with appropriate expertise to determine next steps. Please watch for future information.