

ALP FAQs

Peter Adams

Abstract: Peter Adams, who initiated the ALP program at Community College of Baltimore County and has provided national leadership for ALP program development at other colleges, comments on common questions and concerns about ALP models. He contributes background information about the ALP model, information about the success of ALP on his campus and elsewhere, and data demonstrating that although ALP relies on low class enrollment caps, the ALP model is cost-effective, even when compared to developmental classes with higher enrollments.

1. What's the difference between the ALP and what is sometimes called the co-req model?

ALP is the program developed at the Community College of Baltimore County and now being used at about 240 colleges nationwide. Ten developmental writers are placed directly into a section of college-level English where they join 10 students whose placement is college-level writing. In the hour following, the 10 developmental students attend the ALP developmental class with the same instructor.

Co-requisite models include ALP, but also include any other model in which developmental students are placed directly into college-level English and then receive some form of support as a co-requisite, not a pre-requisite. This support can be an hour or more of instruction, time in a computer lab, or time in a writing center.

In other words, ALP is a co-req model, but not all co-req model are ALP.

2. ALP seems to be the creation of the Gates Foundation or Complete College America. Why can't we recommend a model created by writing faculty?

We do. ALP was invented by a small group of the English faculty at the Community College of Baltimore County in 2006-7. Large organizations like Complete College America, Achieving the Dream, and Jobs for the Future are encouraging schools around the country to redesign their developmental writing program similarly to ALP, but ALP itself was the creation of a group of faculty.

3. Isn't ALP just for students who score close to the cut off for credit English?

Actually, no. At the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC), where ALP was created, 87% of developmental students are eligible for ALP. And our data show that those who scored in the bottom third of the placement test range are just as positively affected by ALP as those scoring in the top third. In one study, we found that 254 of 470 students in the bottom third passed ENG 101 under the ALP model. Based on previous research, if we had placed those 470 students in the traditional, stand-alone development writing course, only 118 would have eventually passed ENG 101. In other words, ALP more than doubled these students' success rate.

The lowest 13% of developmental writers at CCBC are not eligible for ALP; they are placed in a developmental course two levels below credit English, a course that is being transformed into an integrated reading and writing course.

I, myself, would simply place all developmental students into ALP. I think that more of the students we place in the lower level course would be successful in the ALP model. However, we have not tried this yet, so I have no data to support this thought.

Brookdale Community College in New Jersey, however, has allowed all their developmental students, even those with the lowest Accuplacer scores, into ALP with very impressive results. Looking at students who scored below 55 on the Accuplacer, 49% of those who took the non-ALP version of developmental English succeeded with a C or higher. For those who took the ALP version, 75% received a C or higher, a 50% improvement in the success rate.

4. Isn't ALP too expensive?

Actually, it turns out that the ALP model, at least at our school, is less expensive than the traditional stand-alone model. Because of the small class size and because all ALP students take ENG 101, we double the instructional costs to the college. But the increased number of students taking ENG 101 increases the revenue to the college from both tuition and state compensation. In addition, the increased retention under ALP will result in even more revenue because more students will continue taking courses at the college. In states with performance-based funding, additional revenues will result from the improved success rates.

Our calculations of the financial impact can be found in the appendix to this article.

5. Why does ALP work?

We don't know for sure, but here's what we think are some of the features of ALP that account for most of the improved success rates:

Since ALP students take their developmental writing course concurrently with ENG 101, the problem of students passing a developmental writing course and then not registering for ENG 101 is eliminated.

Students sense that they are “college material” is enhanced because they are enrolled in a college-level course.

The cohort effect—ALP students spend six hours a week together, half that time in a small section.

The 101-level students in the comp class serve as role models.

Small class size.

Attention to non-cognitive issues.

The developmental and credit courses are carefully coordinated.

The pedagogy of ALP is based on backward design of the developmental writing course from the credit course and emphasizes active learning, improved reasoning skills, engaged reading, and more effective editing skills.

6. What about integrating reading and writing?

Let’s start with the idea that teaching reading and writing together makes sense. If I ask students to read three or four articles and then to write something in response to them, what are they actually doing as they tackle those articles? Reading, of course. But they’re also writing if they’re annotating the texts and making notes. And at some point they write a first draft. When they start reading that draft over and making improvements, they surely are reading, but they’re also writing . . . writing a revised version of the draft. In fact, I would argue that the acts of reading and writing are inextricably linked, and that, therefore, separating them into two different courses, often taught by faculty from two different departments, is a mistake.

Further, combining them into one course usually reduces the number of credits of developmental work students need to do . . . shortening the pipeline through which they must travel and reducing the chances of their dropping out.

The argument to integrate reading and writing instruction is easy to make; actually carrying this integration out, at many colleges, is extremely difficult. First, faculty in the two disciplines usually feel ill-prepared to teach the other discipline. In some states, issues about credentials are a major obstacle. Developing an integrated curriculum will often require lengthy negotiations between the two disciplines. Of course, it can be done and should be done, but it is important to recognize the difficulties involved.

At the Community College of Baltimore County, we have successfully integrated CCBCC reading and writing courses that are two levels below credit English, but we have not yet

succeeded in integrating reading and writing at the level just below credit English or in ALP, although we hope to do so by fall 2016.

Until we do, the ALP program has adopted an approach we recommend to other schools struggling with this issue. While students still take a separate developmental reading course, in ALP we have recognized that our students will continue to benefit from additional support of their reading. We think of this as “reading across the curriculum.” The reading faculty have thus conducted workshops for those of us in English who could use more preparation to help students with reading.

Some day, in the not-to-distant future, we are hopeful that we will actually integrate these two courses, but in the meantime helping students to become stronger readers by building on what they have learned or are learning in separate reading courses seems like a reasonable compromise. When we do integrate reading and writing, the writing faculty will at least have had some experience working on some reading skills.

7. How did you convince all of your faculty to support ALP?

I’m not sure we did. There are undoubtedly a few doubters left in the department, but two things were most helpful in convincing most of the faculty to give ALP a try.

First, was the data. The data showed clearly and consistently that we were more than doubling the success rate of our developmental students, and most faculty found that convincing.

Second, was the fact that teaching ALP was so rewarding. Teaching the stand-alone course can be very discouraging; no one feels good when half of her class melt away by Thanksgiving, as typically happens in stand-alone sections. ALP, with its small sections, allowed faculty to get to know their students in a way that was impossible in traditional sections and to work with each individual on whatever they were struggling with. As one of our earliest adopters, Sandra Grady, said at the end of the first semester, “This is the best teaching experience I’ve ever had. This is what I went into teaching for in first place.”

8. We know ALP works at CCBC, but how can we know it will work elsewhere?

In 2013, CCBC was fortunate to receive grant funds from the Kresge Foundation to support a major research project. Under the supervision of Achieving the Dream, the Center for Applied Research (CFAR) at Central Piedmont Community College conducted this study. After conducting a national survey of schools that have adopted ALP, CFAR selected 7 for a quantitative study. These schools, as the following chart shows, were large and small, urban and suburban and rural, southern and Midwestern and eastern.

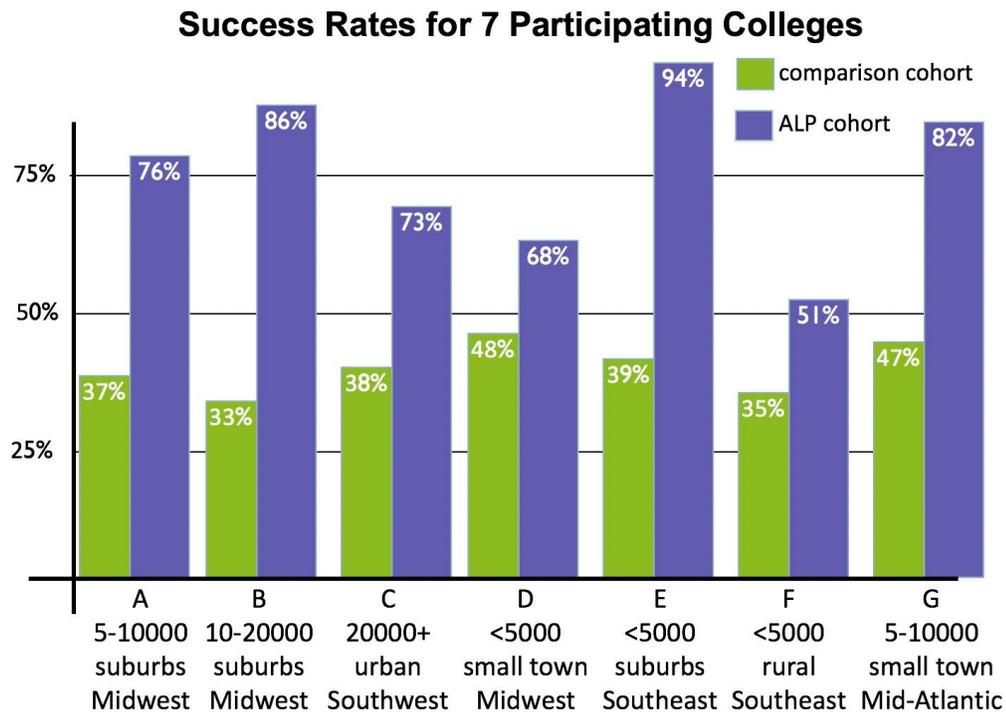


Chart 1 indicates that colleges regardless of size or location achieve results from ALP that are roughly comparable to the success achieved at CCBC. We now feel comfortable recommending ALP for most contexts.

9. Do faculty need extra training to teach ALP?

Most faculty who teach developmental writing have had no formal training to prepare them for this important responsibility. In many parts of the country, faculty are considered credentialed to teach developmental writing if they have a BA in English. At many schools, the majority of developmental writing courses are taught by adjunct faculty.

Our approach to faculty development in ALP at CCBC is to offer ALP Faculty Institutes. We have scheduled seven of these thus far, each accommodating 20 faculty members. The institutes comprise twenty-five hours of training in a multi-day format. Participants develop a project during and after the institute; these projects are presented to the group a few weeks after the institute itself.

These institutes offer both a theoretical discussion of and concrete materials to support each of the following topics:

1. backward curriculum design
2. active learning
3. integrating reading and writing
4. improving thinking skills
5. addressing non-cognitive issues
6. addressing sentence-level error
7. designing writing projects
8. coordinating the ALP developmental course and the composition course

In addition to the formal institutes, we conduct an informal discussion once a month to provide an opportunity for ALP faculty to exchange ideas. We also assign each new ALP faculty member an experienced mentor.

10. What if the ALP model doesn't fit our context?

As of December of 2015, ALP has been adopted in 240 colleges and universities around the country. As far as we know, none of them is doing ALP exactly the way we do. It is an extremely malleable program. At some schools, the classes are slightly larger than ours, at others the classes meet for fewer hours per week, and at still others two different instructors teach the two sections.

The CFAR study, represented in Chart 1 above, also demonstrates that ALP can be successful in a wide range of settings.

Appendix: Calculations of the financial impact of ALP

First, let's calculate the costs for 1000 students under the traditional model. To accommodate 1000 students will require 50 sections (our class size is 20 for all writing classes). Our average faculty salary per section is \$3000, so 50 sections will cost the college \$150,000.

Under the stand-alone model, only 48% of a cohort actually takes ENG 101, so we will need 24 sections to accommodate 480 students. At \$3000 per section, the ENG 101 sections for a cohort of 1000 students under the traditional model will cost the college \$72,000.

So here are the total costs to accommodate 1000 students under the traditional model:

50 sections of developmental @\$3000 per section =	\$150,000
24 sections of ENG 101 @\$3000 per section =	<u>\$72,000</u>
total cost =	\$222,000

Now we need to calculate the *revenue* those 1000 students produce for the college. We'll assume all students are paying Maryland in-state and in-county tuition of \$140 so 1000 students produce \$420,000 in tuition for the developmental course. 480 of them will take ENG 101 producing another \$201,600 in income for a total of \$621,600 in tuition income. In addition, the state funds us at 65% of tuition, so these 1000 students will produce \$404,040 in state revenue for a total revenue of \$1,025,640. Here are the calculations:

1000 students take 3-credit dev course @ \$140/credit =	\$420,000
480 students take 3-credit ENG 101 @ \$140/credit =	<u>\$201,600</u>
total tuition revenue =	\$621,600
state funding @ 65% of tuition =	<u>\$404,040</u>
total revenue =	\$1,025,640

Now we'll do the same calculations for 1000 students under ALP.

First, let's calculate the costs for 1,000 students following the ALP model. To accommodate 1,000 students will require 100 sections (class size is 10 for ALP developmental classes). Our average faculty salary per section is \$3000, so 100 sections will cost the college \$300,000.

Under the ALP model, 100% of a cohort actually takes ENG 101, so, with 10 ALP students in each section, we will need 100 sections to accommodate 1,000 students. At \$3000 per section, the ENG 101 sections for a cohort of 1000 students under the ALP model will cost the college \$300,000. However, those ENG 101 sections are composed of 10 ALP students and 10 101-level students. Since only half the students in each section are ALP, only half the cost, or \$150,000, is attributable to ALP.

Here are the calculations of cost for 1,000 students under ALP:

100 sections of developmental @\$3,000 per section =	\$300,000
100 sections of ENG 101 @\$3,000 per section ÷ 2 =	<u>\$150,000</u>
total cost =	\$450,000

1,000 students take the 3-credit ALP developmental course at \$140 per credit producing \$420,000 in tuition revenue. All 1,000 students take the 3-credit ENG 101 @ \$140/credit producing an additional \$420,000 in tuition revenue for a total of \$840,000 in tuition revenue. The state of Maryland funds us at 65% of tuition producing an additional \$546,000 in revenue for a total revenue of \$1,386,000. Here is the calculation for ALP revenues:

1,000 students take 3-credit dev course @ \$140/credit =	\$420,000
1,000 students take 3-credit ENG 101 @ \$140/credit =	<u>\$420,000</u>
total tuition revenue =	\$840,000
state funding @ 65% of tuition =	<u>\$546,000</u>
total revenue =	\$1,386,000

	traditional stand-alone	ALP
costs	\$222,000	\$450,000
revenue	\$1,025,640	\$1,386,000
net effect	+\$805,640	+\$936,000

In other words, both ALP and traditional stand-alone courses bring in funds to the college, but ALP actually brings in more funds. For each 1,000 students, ALP produces \$130,360 more for the college.

Further, students who take ALP are more likely to persist to other coursework bringing in additional funds to the college. And, for those in states with performance-based funding, the higher success rates under ALP will produce even more funding.

ALP is not too expensive; in fact, it is more profitable for the college than the traditional stand-alone model.

Peter Dow Adams

Peter Adams taught at the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) for thirty-six years before retiring in 2014. Over the years, his responsibilities at CCBC included coordinating the writing program, chairing the college's committee on general education, and chairing the English Department. Peter developed the model for redesign of basic writing now known as the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP). For the past five years Peter has travelled extensively around the country presenting on ALP to individual schools and to state-wide gatherings, and he has conducted faculty development workshops for schools that have decided to adapt the ALP model.