

Inside Higher Education, August 5, 2011 (Page 1 of 2)

## The remedial Ph.D.

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More than one-third of all entering college students need at least one remedial course, and the proportion is much higher at most community colleges. That means that college students may be more likely to take a remedial course than a class in most academic disciplines. But who teaches the courses? And who leads the efforts to study and improve remedial education?

Those questions are behind a new movement to create doctoral programs in remedial and developmental education. Currently, there is only one such program, an Ed.D in developmental education at Grambling State University. But the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has just approved the creation of two more Ed.D. programs -- at Sam Houston State University and Texas State University -- as well as another Texas State degree program, the field's first Ph.D.

Proponents of these programs say that the norm today is for those who are teaching remedial courses not to have been trained to do so, and for those who are studying these programs to have worked on other topics in graduate school. "Many of us in this field got here in roundabout ways through other content areas, but we were focused on the population in developmental education contexts," said Eric J. Paulson, a professor of curriculum and instruction at Texas State, and coordinator of the new doctoral programs there.

Materials submitted to the Texas coordinating board noted that faculty job listings on *Inside Higher Ed* and elsewhere regularly seek candidates with experience teaching remedial courses, and that the nation's educators are debating how to improve these courses -- seeing the high failure rates to date as an impediment to meeting national goals of graduating more students.

A coordinating board analysis noted that the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Texas Workforce Commission both project modest increases between now and 2018 in administrative jobs in higher education. Neither agency has projections for remedial education instructors as a single category, but they both have a category that combines remedial instructors, adult education instructors and GED teachers. For that category, the Bureau of Labor Statistics projects a 15.1 percent increase by 2018 and the Texas Workforce Commission projects a 22.6 percent increase -- figures that the commission said suggest that there will be a need for more people to run remedial programs as well.

Sam Houston State plans to admit 15 students to its first Ed.D. class, while Texas State plans to admit four full-time students to its first Ph.D. class and eight to its Ed.D. class. Graduates of all of the programs are expected to include some who teach, and others who do research or run programs. Paulson said that Texas State students would take both foundation courses and research courses (qualitative and quantitative), and that the program would have a comprehensive exam and a dissertation, with expectations that students publish journal articles or make conference presentations.

In some ways the creation of a Ph.D. in developmental education follows a pattern of other credentials that have been useful to many in higher education whose expertise relates to the type of student they teach, not just a discipline. Several universities have created certificate programs in community college teaching, for instance, or master's degrees focused on teaching composition at community colleges.

Hunter R. Boylan, director of the National Center for Developmental Education and a professor of higher education at Appalachian State University, said he saw the argument for creating doctoral degrees focused on remedial education. While there are many education doctoral programs focused on adult education, and some people have made developmental education a focus there, he said he thought the

## Inside Higher Education, August 5, 2011 (Page 2 of 2)

field of developmental education needed more research, and that community colleges need more people versed in the latest ideas on how to improve programs. "We have an awful lot of people who wander into this field from someplace else and have to learn everything they know on the job," he said.

Thomas R. Bailey, director of the Community College Research Center at Teachers College Columbia University, said he was enthusiastic about universities focusing attention on remedial education, but was less certain about the need for separate doctoral programs. "This is a very important issue, so emphasizing this will probably give more attention to it," he said.

But he said that many people who do research on remedial education at his center at Teachers College didn't earn doctorates in the field, nor do they work at centers that focus only on remedial education. In Bailey's case, his Ph.D. is in economics, from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

"It's important that we think about developmental education in a broader context," he said. "Many of the students we've labeled as remedial aren't that different from the students we've said are college-ready."

Bailey and others said that they believed that the issue of remedial education is likely to continue to be important in the United States for some time. Paulson, of Texas State, stressed that these issues -- while receiving more attention now than in the past -- are hardly new. "Developmental education, under different names and descriptions, has been a part of higher education in the U.S. as long as there has been higher education in the U.S.," he said. "Though it's sometimes invisible, it's been a part of postsecondary educational contexts historically and will continue to be."

He said that even though it's clear that "we have work to do" to conduct research and improve programs, and that progress can be made, people shouldn't assume that students will soon all be college-ready.

Boylan agreed. "We've had [remediation] for a long time, and despite recent increases, it has in some ways declined in the last 100 years." Asked if it was unusual to create doctoral programs to serve a need premised on a continued problem (in this case students who aren't college-ready), Boylan said other professions are based on the realistic expectation of problems. "Isn't that what attorneys do?" he said.

— **Scott Jaschik**