

Many college students take remedial courses, but only some benefit, researchers find

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Credit: RTI International

Steering new college students into remedial classes can boost a poorly prepared student's chances of success, but doesn't appear to benefit students with a stronger academic background, RTI International researchers have found.

Many [students](#) arrive at college unprepared to take on college-level classes and have to enroll in remedial courses in an effort to catch up. Among a national sample of students who started college in the 2003-2004 academic year, 68 percent of those beginning at public 2-year institutions and 40 percent of those beginning at public 4-year institutions took at least one remedial course during their college career.

"The practice of remedial education has been controversial among educators and students because it hasn't been clear if it leads to student success," said Xianglei Chen, a research education analyst at RTI and the lead author of the report. "Our new report joins other studies that provide real evidence about potential benefits of enrolling in and completing these courses, particularly for weakly prepared students."

[The report showed that students must complete remedial courses](#), not just enroll in them, in order to reap the benefits. However, remedial course completion rates are not as high as one would hope: just 49 percent of remedial coursetakers at public 2-year institutions and 59 percent of remedial coursetakers at public 4-year institutions completed all the remedial courses in which they enrolled.

The report also showed that completing remedial courses especially benefits weakly prepared students; they earned more college credits and had a higher probability of transferring to a 4-year school and attaining a bachelor's degree than their peers who had a similar background and academic preparation but did not enroll in remedial courses. Evidence of such benefits for remedial completers with moderate or strong preparation is not strong, however.

"More research is needed to understand why moderately or strongly prepared students end up in remedial classes after they arrive at [college](#)," Chen said. "Colleges could also benefit from knowing more about the major obstacles that prevent students from successfully completing remedial courses."

Provided by RTI International

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