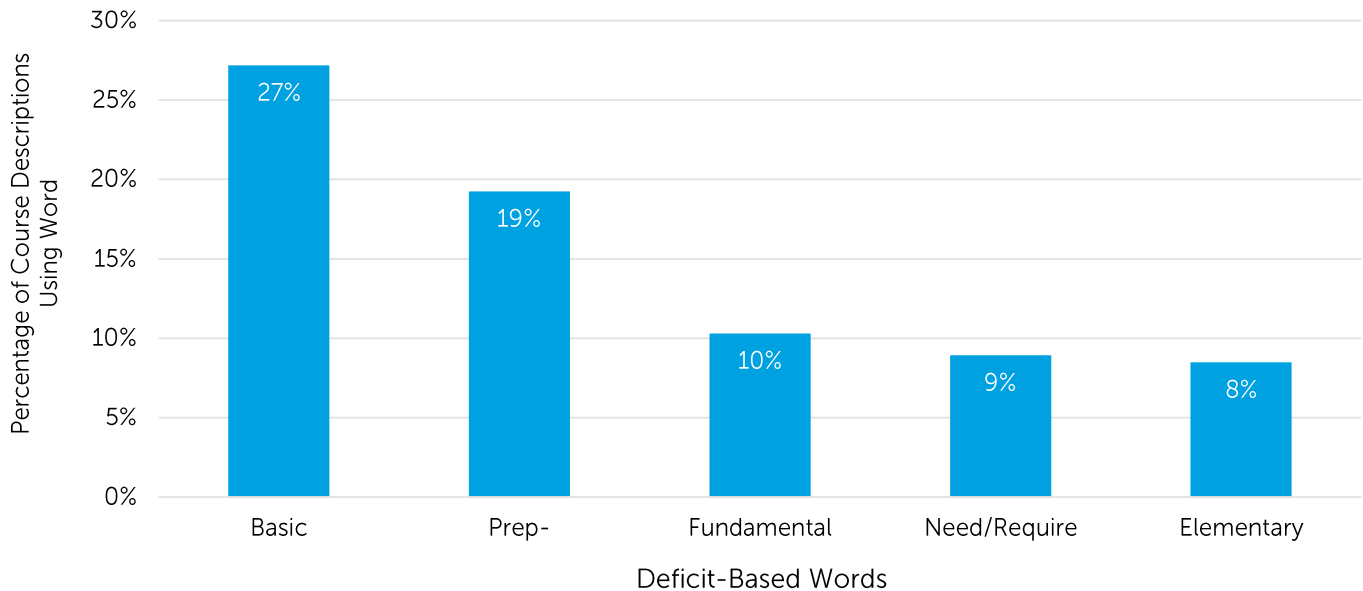


Deficit Language in Course Descriptions

Common deficit language used in course descriptions at SSTF Scaling Sites.



Source: Student-Ready Strategies analysis of data collected in 2019 from the SSTF scaling sites. Notes: Scaling sites include Arkansas, the California Community Colleges, select institutions from the CUNY system, University System of Georgia, Ohio, and the SUNY system.

Through a Strong Start to Finish investment in curricular mapping and course data analysis, Student-Ready Strategies found that many institutions utilize deficit language in the names and descriptions of their developmental education courses. Deficit language includes words that convey needs, are externally- and problem-focused, and communicate what a student is missing. For example, the course catalog might describe a course as “designed for students who are unprepared/not ready/require remediation to be successful in college” or list learning outcomes as “reviewing basic/fundamental skills” or “addressing deficiencies/needs.” [Substantial research](#), including that on [growth mindset](#), demonstrates that negative, deficit-based words sends strong, likely unintentional, signals to students about the institution’s perception of their ability to succeed.

A thorough analysis of course titles and descriptions from the 2019 Scaling Sites course data revealed prevalent use of these deficit words or phrases, with more than one in four courses utilizing the word “basic.” The fact that students of color, particularly Black students, are disproportionately placed into developmental courses means that this deficit language can negatively affect the mindset of Black students more than their white peers. This Points of Interest shows that deficit-based language is commonly used in course descriptions at SSTF Scaling Sites.

For more information, contact Student-Ready Strategies at info@studentreadystrategies.com or visit <http://StudentReadyStrategies.com>.

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